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OF WW2

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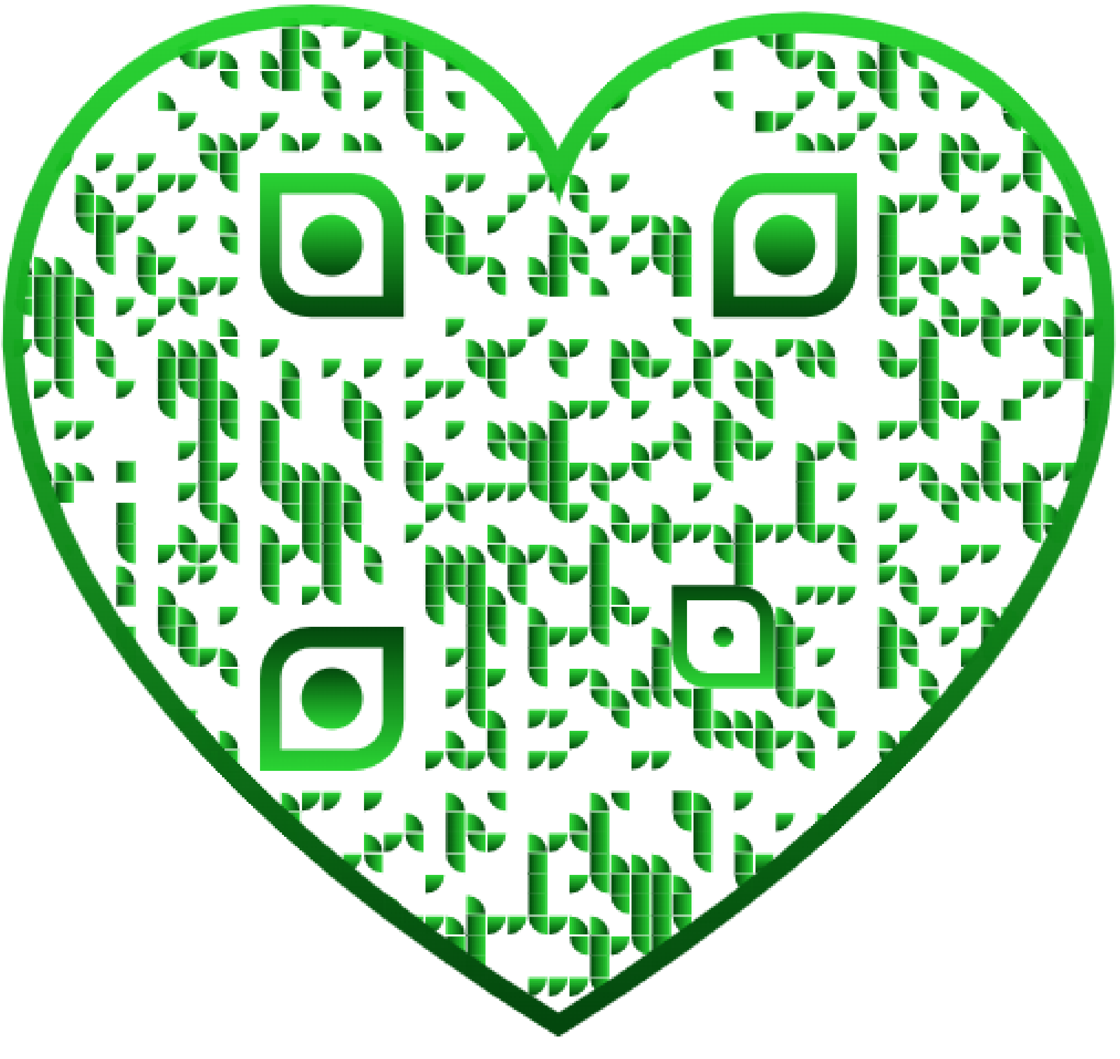

THE WAR'S MOST DESPICABLE VILLAINS

War is brutal. World War II saw acts of terror against civilians, summary executions, mass murder and forced labour – with a desire to exterminate as the overriding aim. Wartime rulers committed atrocities against groups perceived as subhuman: doctors in Third Reich concentration camps used prisoners for macabre experiments, disabled children were systematically killed, and millions of citizens from Eastern European countries were forced west to provide Germany with slave labour.

In this bookazine, we examine the rulers, doctors and criminals who let this happen. At the top of the blacklist is Adolf Hitler, who with his grotesque vision and oratorical talent founded a mass movement and seduced an entire nation – ultimately leading the world into the most brutal and devastating war in history.

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NSDAP
DEUTSCHLAND
ERWACHE

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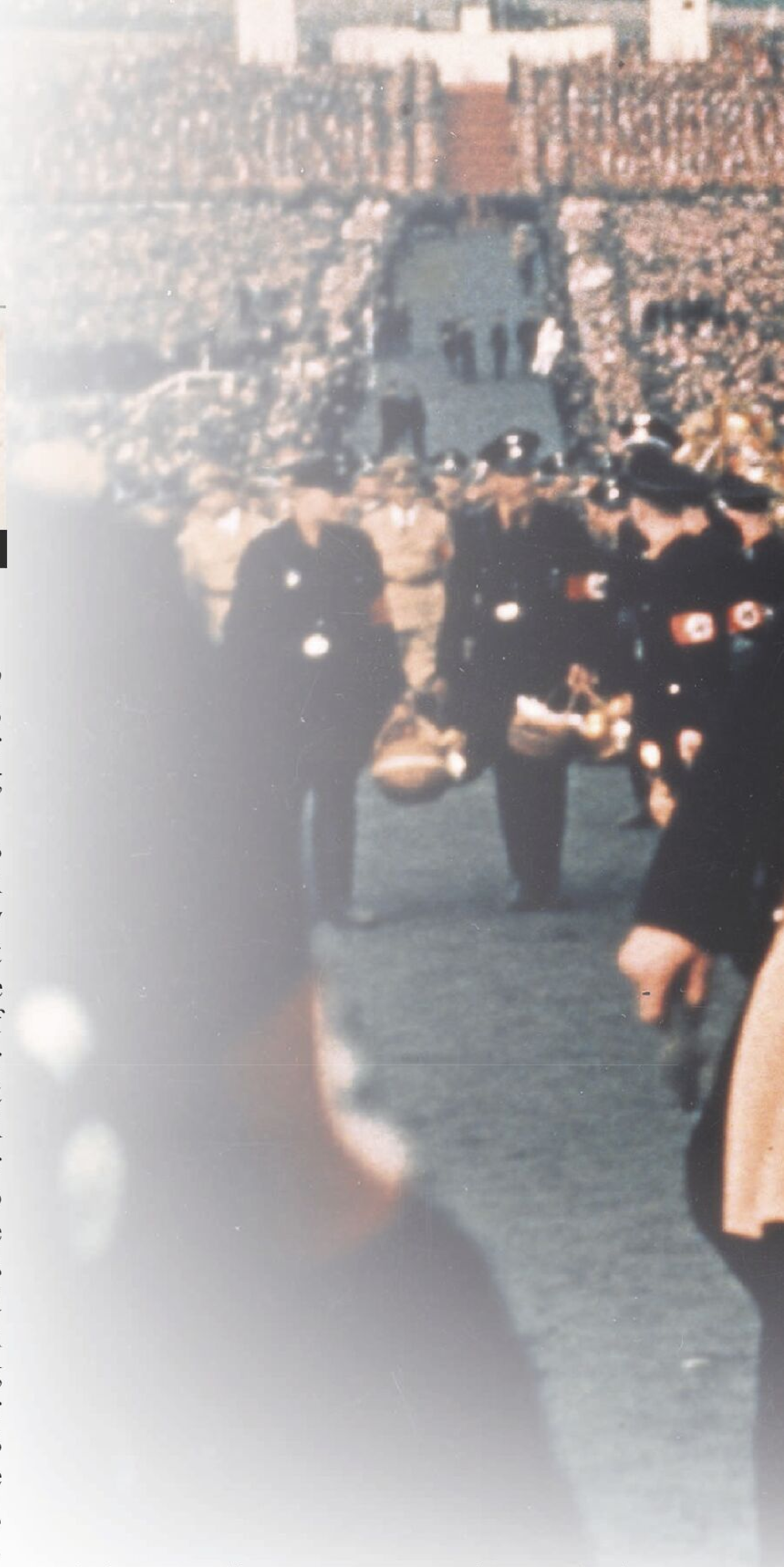
THE PEOPLE'S NEW MESSIAH

1921-1939

Even in the very early years of Nazism, a bizarre cult emerged around Adolf Hitler. His followers not only saw Hitler as a strong party leader, nor as just a politically gifted person. He was far more; their Führer. An infallible saviour sent by God to save Germany.

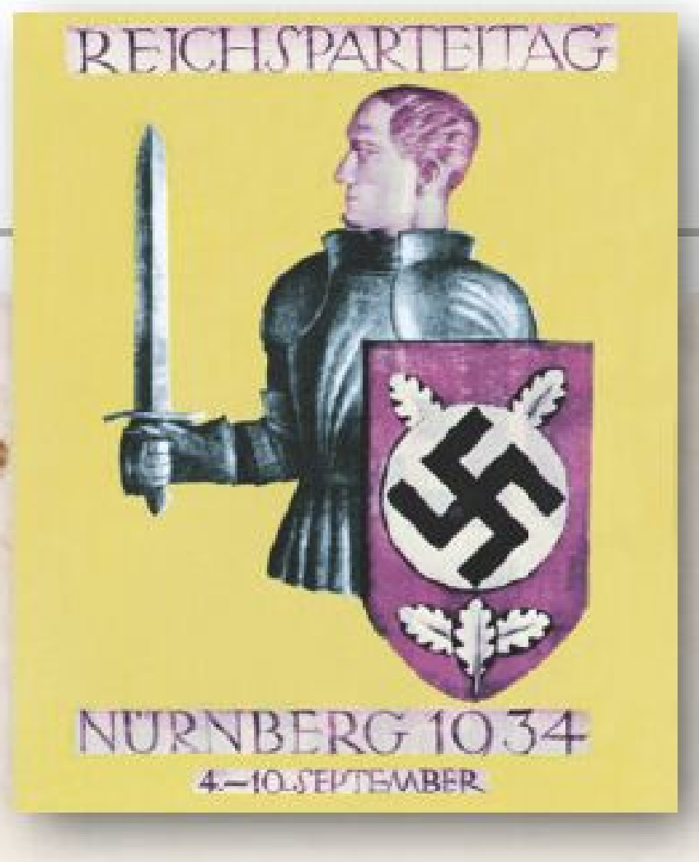
The Hitler mania grew to such heights that the Führer was considered a new Messiah with divine powers.



1921-39

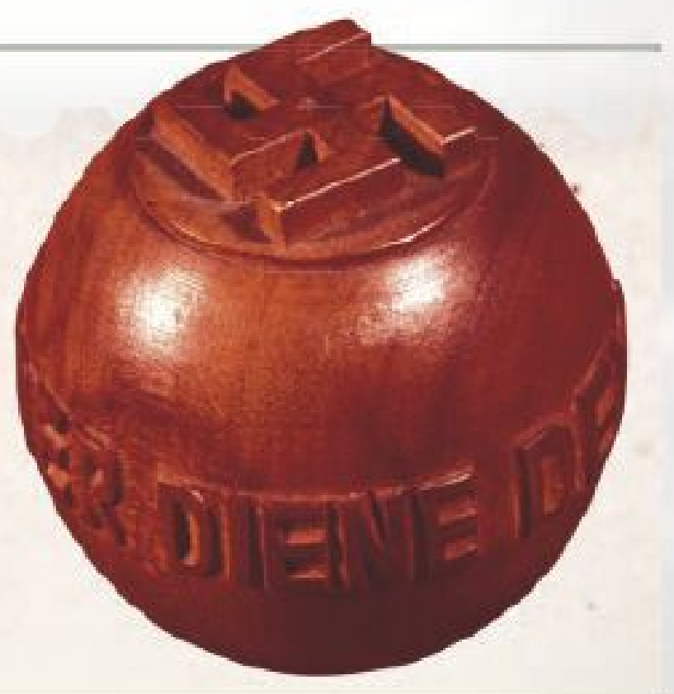
1921 In future, Adolf Hitler is to be addressed *Führer* by the party.

1923 First party mass meeting is held in Nuremberg.



1933 *Heil Hitler* becomes the compulsory salute for public employees.

1934 Hitler awards himself an official title. In future, the Germans are to address him *Führer*.



1921 1923 1933 1934

On 7 November 1921, the Nazi party's newspaper Völkischer Beobachter published a short memo. From now on, the Party Chairman was no longer to be addressed using the old-fashioned "Chairman" – instead, he would hold the title of "Führer of the Party". Adolf Hitler was the first – and only – Nazi to call himself Führer – a title which in time would take on an almost religious character.

The newspaper later wrote about the joy which the new Führer brought to the members of the Nazi movement. "In Hitler", the party newspaper wrote, "they had found what millions of Germans were longing for: A Führer and a new Messiah". However bombastic this statement may sound, it did hold a certain truth.

Otto von Bismarck gathered the many small German states in an empire in the 1870s.

NAZISM BECOMES A CULT

In the years after emperor Wilhelm II's abdication, the German people had been left in a kind of a vacuum. To many Germans, democracy seemed to be a weak alternative to the former so glorious German empire. Salvation from the colourless and miserable political characters of the Weimar Republic was much sought for, and many Germans were looking for a man who could rebuild Germany.

"We long for a leader who can show us the way", wrote a German reporter in 1923. He continued: "The leader to come will be tough and ruthless. He will be executing God's will". Following his imprisonment and release, Hitler began to stage himself as precisely a kind of religious saviour. The strategy had been well thought out during his time in the Landsberg prison. The Party policy was to basically promise everything to everybody, and without a firm political footing, Hitler became the cement that tied the growing number of Party members together.

Therefore, the creation of a Führer Cult was a deliberate choice for the fragmented Nazi Party. Especially in 1926, when the Party grew out of its role as a Bavarian rebel movement and into being a full-fledged, nation-wide party. With the appointment of Joseph Goebbels as Party leader in Berlin in 1926, a new movement began to take shape. National Socialism changed in character and became something akin to a religious cult. Initially for the faithful few, later on for millions of men and women in the Third Reich. Joseph Goebbels soon turned out to be the best choice for building the so-called Führer Cult. The young doctor was an ardent admirer of Hitler and, in his articles, described him as "a man, who in the midst of the German people's darkest hour, miraculously brings light and renewed hope".

The future propaganda minister was not alone in his admiration, as Hitler had an almost compelling effect on his followers. A young man described how, at Goebbels' suggestion, he attended one of Hitler's speeches. Once he had heard the words flow from the Führer's mouth, he was completely spellbound and had only one wish: "To win with Hitler or to die for him". The Nazis' political statements seemed less important.

HEIL HITLER AS PARTY SALUTE

In 1926, the Party decided to introduce a new greeting among its members. In future, all members were to stretch their right arm and say "Heil Hitler", whenever they met. This greeting was another means to bind party members together across political standpoints. The stretched arm reminded of the grandiose Roman empire, and also, Hitler became synonymous with the Party.

Slowly, the Nazi leadership began to describe Hitler as an almost biblical saviour. In "Mein Kampf" he had described the German people as a specially elect people – like the Jews in the Bible. When Hitler talked about the coming thousand-year Reich, it was an obvious comparison with the Revelation of St John the Divine's description of Jesus, who would return from heaven and walk on the earth for a thousand years.

To complete the picture of the almighty Hitler, the Party leadership decided that Hitler's speeches were always to be absolute and never contain confessions which could show signs of doubt or error. Rudolf Hess, Hitler's secretary, who wrote down "Mein Kampf", described the tactics in great

LENI RIEFENSTAHL 1902-2003

THE DIVINE FILM-MAKER

■ Helene Bertha Amalie "Leni" Riefenstahl was, as so many other Germans, very fascinated by Hitler. She therefore asked permission to direct a film from the party meeting in Nuremberg in 1934. The result, "Triumph of the Will", is a one-hour propaganda tribute of the greatness of Nazism, yet is still considered an epic and innovative masterpiece. The film won Riefenstahl recognition as Europe's most visionary director. The female director won even more respect for "Olympia", a portrait of the Olympics in Berlin. After the war, Riefenstahl spent three years in American prison camps, charged with producing Nazi propaganda. She was sentenced as a wartime collaborator. Until her death, Riefenstahl denied having supported the Nazi regime, but never concealed her admiration of Hitler.

Director of:"Triumph of the Will"–"Day of Freedom"–"Olympia"–"Lowlands"

A crowd numbering thousands pay tribute to their Führer in 1938. The attendants ascribed healing power to his hands.

“With seven men, Hitler had created a mass movement for millions”

detail: “The Führer must be absolute in his speeches. He must not weigh for or against and in no circumstance leave the Germans to believe that something else might be true”. According to Rudolf Hess, Hitler was to act like the founders of the great world religions: As a saviour sent from God.

HITLER HAS HEALING ABILITIES

In the early 1930s, ordinary Germans joined the Nazi Party in great numbers, and the belief in Hitler as Germany’s saviour spread among the masses. One man described his “conversion” to Nazism:

“I realised that the rebirth of Germany could only happen through Hitler. A man who was not born in a palace, but in a simple hut”. The comparison with the Christian narrative about Jesus shows how Hitler had created a Messiah-like impression of himself among the Germans. The Führer cult even became so fanatical that the supporters began to ascribe divine abilities to Hitler. A young SS man explained how his throat contracted, overwhelmed when the Führer shook his hand at a Party meeting. The man’s friends immediately gathered around him, and tumult broke out. Everybody tried to touch the hand that had felt the Führer’s skin – and feel Hitler’s power run through them. This reaction was similar to that of Christians in the Middle Ages, who met their monarchs, whom were thought to be in direct contact with God.

The fanatics constantly found new and stronger ways to express their adoration. A newspaper article talks about “the new phenomenon, which is spreading in German homes: The National Socialist domestic altar”. Figures of Christ and crosses on the wall were replaced by busts and pictures of the Führer. Every day, Hitler’s worshippers could lay small gifts and flowers on the altar. In the Reichstag election in 1930, Hitler’s growing popularity showed on the voting lists for the first time. The Nazis went from being an insignificant party to becoming the second-biggest party in the Reichstag with 107 mandates.

MEDIA SWARM AROUND THE FÜHRER

The 1930 election marked a change for the National Socialists from being a small party with few fanatical followers to being a movement with millions of supporters. At the Party meetings, a story was told about the Führer, who with just seven men had created a mass movement for millions of people, just like Jesus Christ had done 2,000 years before with his 12 disciples.

All of a sudden, the Nazi leader was the hottest politician of the time, and the media overflowed with articles about Hitler. The established press, however, still saw Hitler as a charlatan who could in no way lead Germany. The Nazis had no political programme, members ranged from workers to nobles who could not get along, and Hitler’s cult would soon fall apart, they predicted. Yet the opponents were impressed with his ▶

GERMANS ENGAGED IN NAZI CULT

In the 1930s, the Hitler cult flourished in the Third Reich. Millions of men and women abandoned their Christian faith and turned to Nazism. Everything was plastered with swastikas, and in the homes, housewives would remove Jesus from their walls and replace him with Hitler busts. The Germans embraced Nazism to the extent that even headstones were engraved and Christmas trees decorated with swastikas.

Hitler busts in thousands of German homes.

Pad holder for the office.

Christmas tree stand in the shape of a swastika.

talk about salvation, a new era and hope. Even the Communist Party changed their tactics and started to build a cult around their party leader Ernst Thälmann, who, slightly unimaginatively, was given the title of Leader of the German proletariat. This was in clear contravention of the Communist principles of equality, but shows that even established German parties looked to the Nazi way of attracting supporters.

Germans want the Führer

In the 1932 presidential election, Joseph Goebbels launched the so-called "Hitler over Germany" election campaign. In a rented plane, Hitler engaged in a veritable work rage, and in six days, flew to 20 cities and spoke at a total of 148 meetings to millions of Germans. The symbolism was unmistakeable: Like a god from heaven, the Führer descended from the skies every day to save his people.

> "Even the Communist Party changed their tactic and began to build up a cult around party leader Ernst Thälmann"

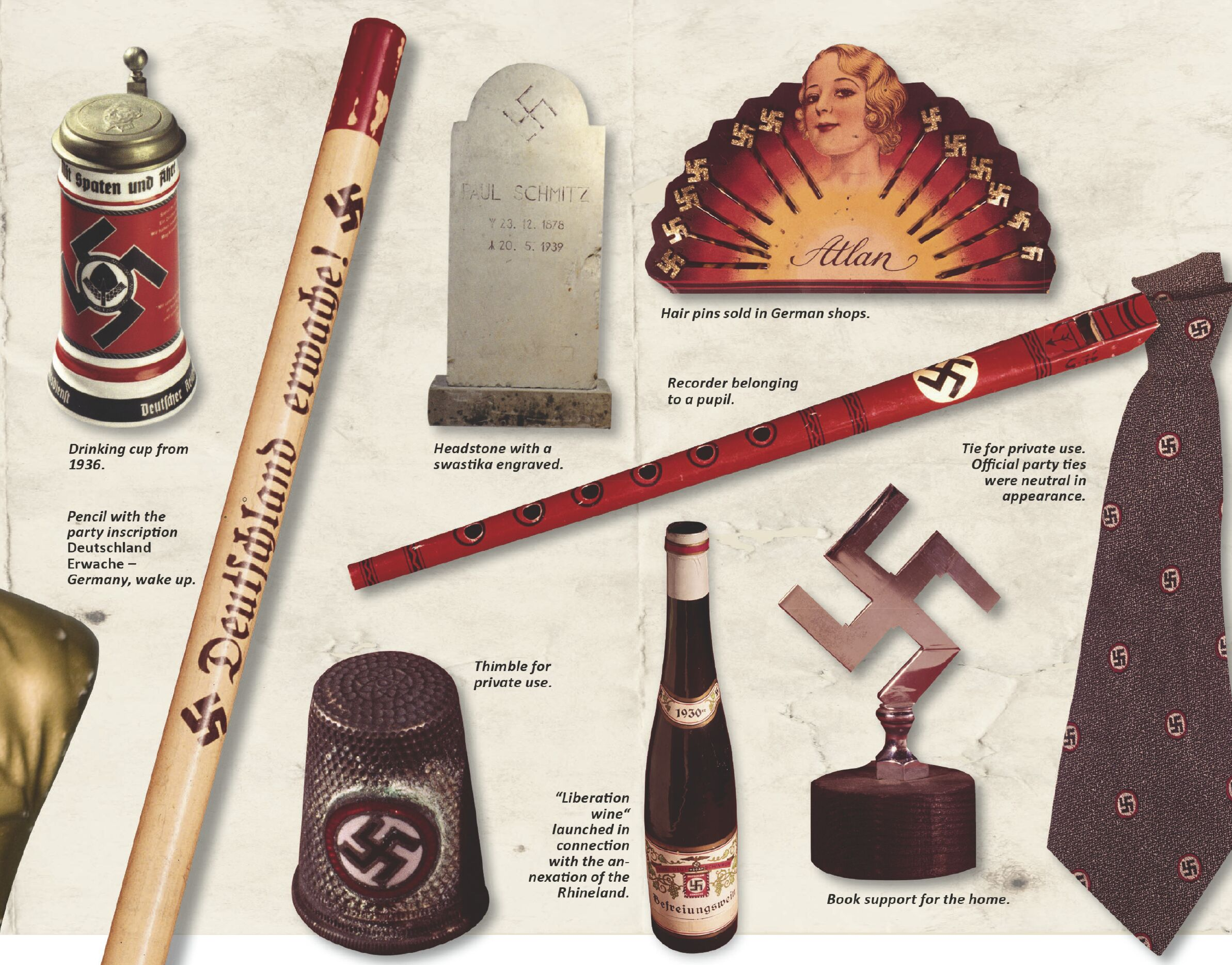
An attendant described the intense atmosphere before "the saviour" appeared: "Suddenly, everybody began to whisper enthusiastically. We quivered as Hitler, dressed in a simple black jacket, stepped onto the platform. From his position, the Führer stared down at his people, and a mass of swastika flags went up. The crowd let out a gigantic roar", the attendant wrote. Hitler's voice – hoarse after one week's speeches – presented his visions in a thunderous voice: Out of Germany's many political parties would grow one uniform nation – the German nation. After the speech, Horst Wessel's Nazi hymn blasted out of the loudspeakers, and Hitler disappeared. According to the attendant, "thousands stood behind, now looking up to Hitler with renewed hope. Here was Germany's saviour".

Now, the Party propaganda consistently referred to Hitler as the Führer, the prophet, the warrior and the last hope of the masses. However difficult this might be to understand, many Germans accepted these words uncritically. The 1930s' financial crisis swept through the country, and within a few years, unemployment had exploded.

Old conservative politicians had had their chance, and it was evident that they were unable to save the Germans. The alternative – the feared Communist scourge – was unthinkable to many. The young, untrained Austrian stood in contrast to all other politicians. The Germans saw him as a breath of fresh air, and National Socialism was no longer just a political party. It was a hope, a mass movement, to which the Germans flocked. The voting lists for the 1932 elections no longer stated the party name, but just "the Hitler movement". And in the daily press, the followers were simply called mini-Hitlers.

Hitler trees planted in cities

Thus it came as no surprise that large parts of the German population supported the seizure of power in 1933. After that, the snowball continued to roll even faster, not



Drinking cup from 1936.

Pencil with the party inscription Deutschland Erwache – Germany, wake up.

Headstone with a swastika engraved.

Hair pins sold in German shops.

Recorder belonging to a pupil.

Tie for private use. Official party ties were neutral in appearance.

Thimble for private use.

"Liberation wine" launched in connection with the annexation of the Rhineland.

Book support for the home.

least because negative talk about the Führer was banned. The Nazis set up special courts to handle any violation. This way, the Nazis ensured that Goebbels' propaganda picture of the Führer was the only one to reach the wider German population.

Within one month, Germany completely surrendered to their new Führer. A bookseller in Berlin felt that "a saviour had been sent" and celebrated that spring had finally come to Germany. In the German cities, men, women and children planted Hitler oaks and Hitler lime trees along streets and squares. Other cities competed in appointing Hitler honorary citizen.

On Hitler's birthday that year, the streets of German cities were filled with banners, flags and signs congratulating "the people's chancellor". Flags and flowers decorated the houses in villages, and shop owners in Munich placed Hitler busts decorated with laurels in their windows. Former German national heroes like Bismarck and Hindenburg had never been fêted as much. The Germans' adoration was so great that even the Hitler-critical right-wing newspaper Münchner Neueste Nachrichten surrendered:

"The enthusiastic participation in the Chancellor's glorious day proves that Adolf Hitler is now recognised as the Führer by the entire population and that the hearts of the Germans belong to him". The tone was the same in all German newspapers and newsreels in the spring of 1933.

Jews must not heil

To the Nazis, these statements had a convenient ambiguous effect. Above all, they celebrated "real" Germans, who supported the Führer, and indirectly stamped those ▶

Girls and women early engaged in the Führer Cult. Hitler declared himself "married to Germany" and was unmarried until the end of the war.

who denied to take part in the praise as anti-social and un-German.

The sharp distinction between the Führer's real Germans and "unpatriotic elements" became even clearer with a directive issued on 13 July 1933. Here, Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick made the Hitler salute mandatory for all public employees. The Führer was now praised every day in offices all over Germany. Two weeks later, Frick found it necessary to send out an addendum to the decree: Physically handicapped people, who did not have their right arm, were allowed to use their left arm to salute.

The Nazis set up special courts which were to punish citizens who refused to salute. Offenders were at risk of being sent to a concentration camp. Even foreigners were not exempt from the compulsory salute. The Portuguese consul, for example, was beaten up by SA members after having refused to respond to a salute. Yet, the salute was banned for inmates in German prisons, and not least for Jews, who stood out clearly from the rest. When a group of travelling folk musicians trained their monkeys to make a perfect Hitler salute with stretched arms, the then Gestapo leader, Hermann Göring, had the monkeys killed.

SHOP ASSISTANTS SALUTE WITH HEIL

Little by little, the salute crept in everywhere in the Germans' daily lives. Postmen used the salute when delivering parcels to citizens. Small metal signs on squares and in streets reminded people to remember to salute the Führer, and shop assistants met their customers with a "Heil Hitler, how may I help you?". Despite propaganda, restrictions and the ordinary German citizen's fascination of Hitler, it was a fourth aspect that completed Hitler's transformation from a mortal politician to the divine Führer of the Germans.

Within a year, the many Nazi construction projects gave work to almost two million Germans. Hitler's work programme seemed an economic miracle, and a feeling emerged that the new chancellor had divine powers. Everything he touched became a success.

The economic miracles (achieved through borrowed money), inspired respect for Hitler, even among the most severe

> “God had given the German people a saviour”

Hitler speaks at a Party congress in Nuremberg in 1933. The gigantic mass meetings cemented the Führer's position as the country's leader.

of his critics. In 1935, the wife of a former Communist explained that after four years of unemployment, her husband had had a job during the two years after the Führer came to power. She had a picture of Hitler on her wall, and every day she would say the Lord's prayer with her daughter, not to God, but to Germany's saviour.

That year, Göring said in a radio address that "God had given the people of Germany a saviour. Nothing can shake our belief that Hitler was sent by God to save Germany".

THE FÜHRER AVOIDS POLITICS

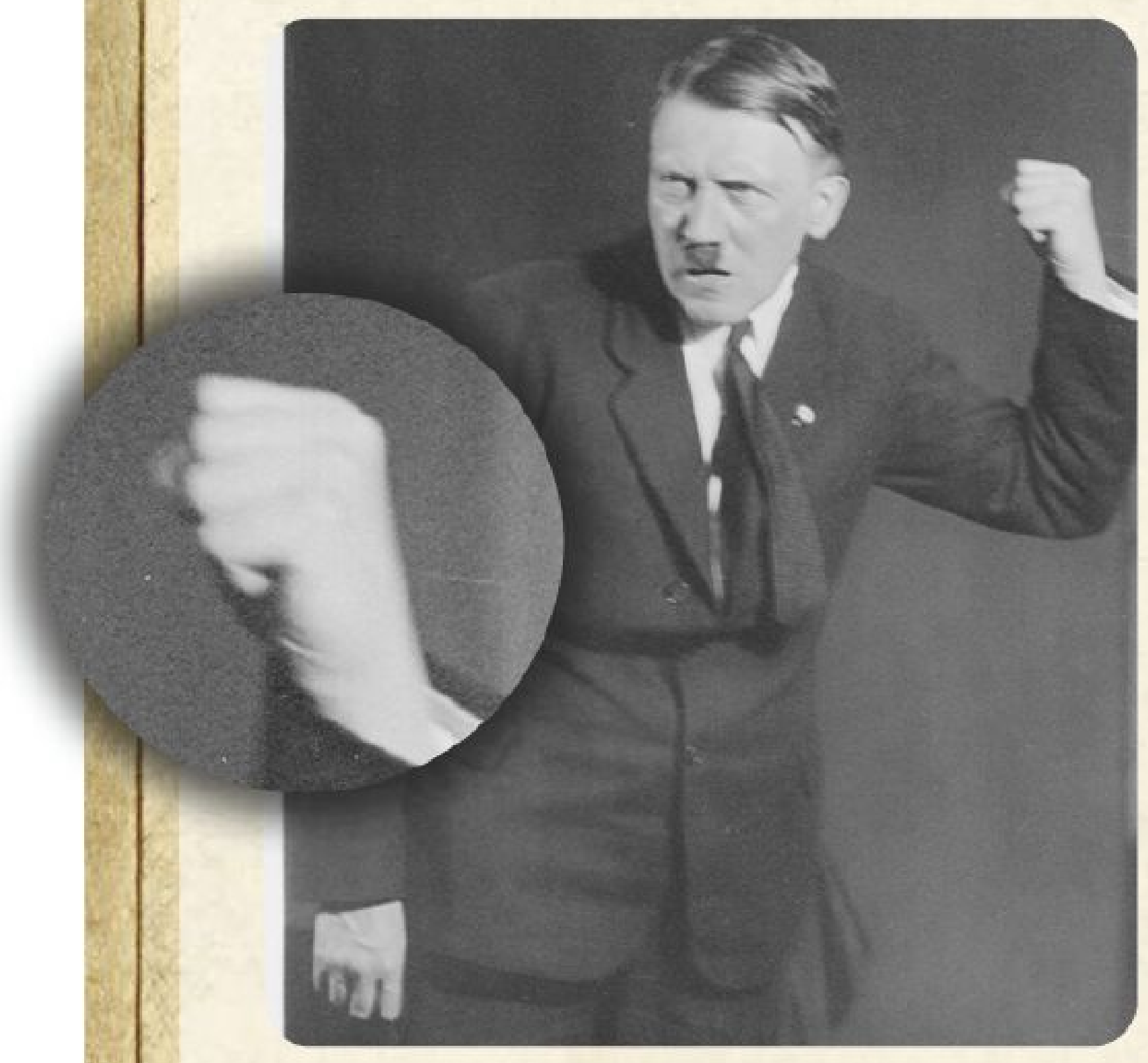
At the party congress held in Nuremberg that year, the picture was complete. The young film-maker Leni Riefenstahl portrayed the days of the congress in her film "Triumph of the Will". The opening scene, where Hitler arrives through the clouds in his plane, is a clear reference to Jesus' descent from the heavens. The Messiah-like narrative continues until the end where giant crowds break out in a powerful series of Sieg Heils. More than 20 million Germans were seduced by the film in the cinemas.

From 1936, Hitler gradually withdrew from all domestic decisions. The distance to the party, which made the unpopular political decisions, was intended to strengthen the picture of the Führer as infallible. Hitler was portrayed as the Führer, who kept a watchful eye on everything and thought out Germany's future grandeur. The next years saw a number of foreign-policy triumphs, and Hitler managed to maintain the picture of himself as the Germans' saviour until the beginning of the war.

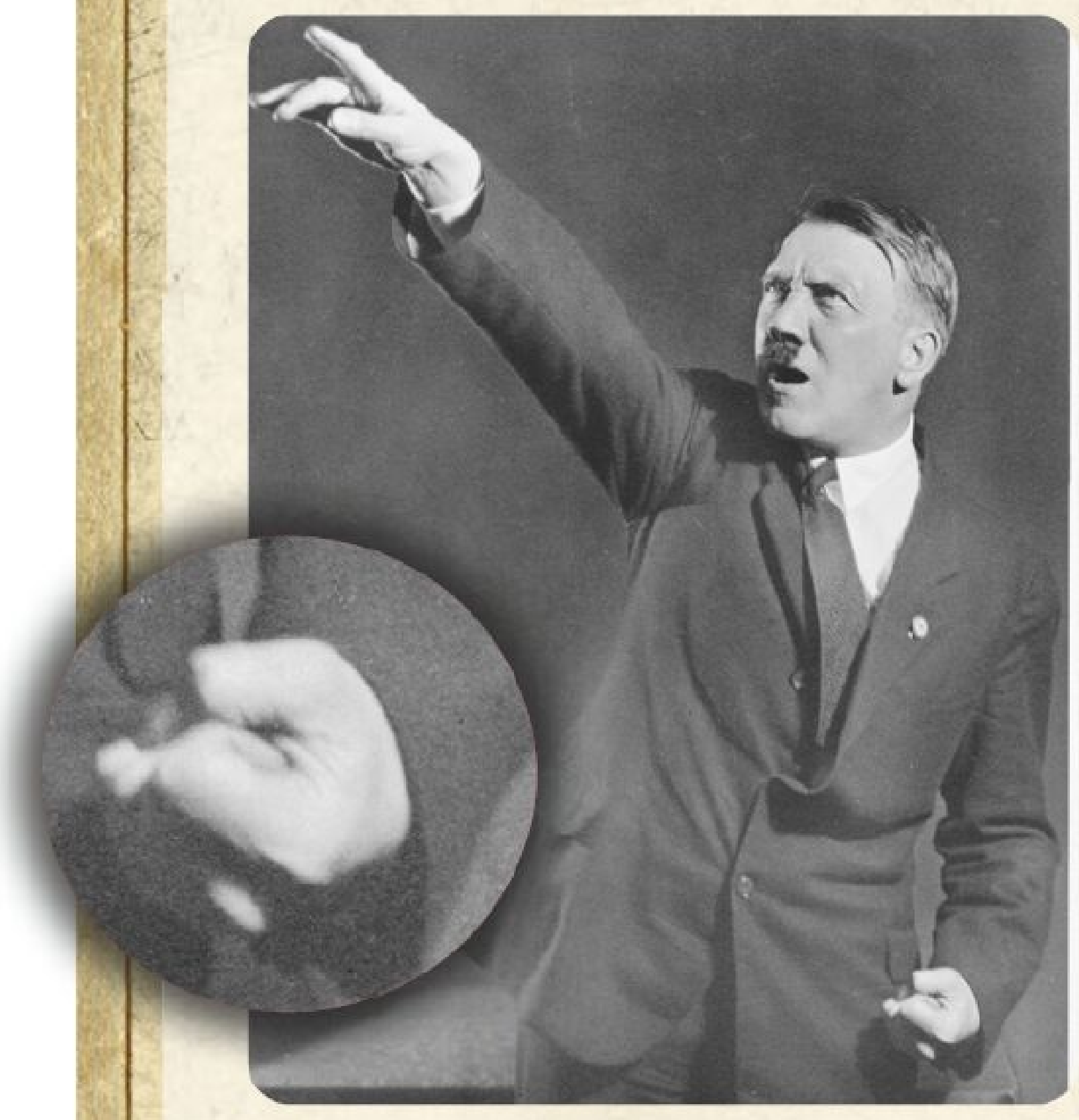
HITLER'S RHETORIC

EVERY MOVEMENT PRACTISED TO PERFECTION

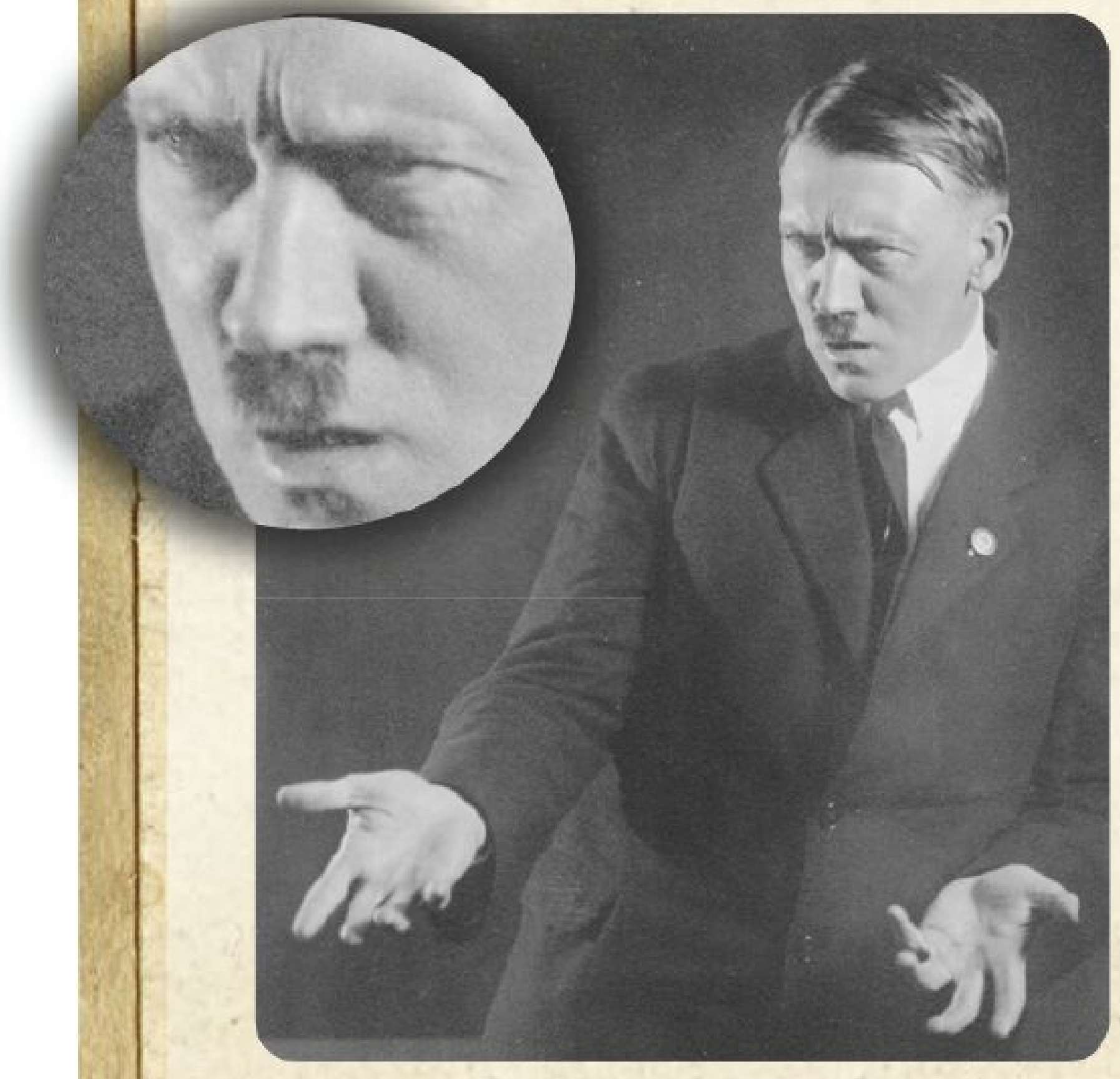
In 1926, Hitler contacted the Bavarian photographer Heinrich Hoffmann. He photographed Hitler in various speech postures. Later – taking advice from experts and actors – the pictures were used to refine and strengthen Hitler's rhetorical expression.



1 The fist emanates power, yet is moderated by the right side of the body. At rhetorical peaks, both hands were clenched.



2 Hitler stares and points to the heaven as if words are flowing from God through his arm, until stopped by the fist.



3 The open hands and arms reflect almighty Middle Age monarchs' way of being worshipped by the people. The eyes are squeezed together to underline the seriousness of the statement.

THE VOICE OF NAZISM

1926-1939

The Nazis were the first in history to take full advantage of propaganda. Newspapers, radio, newsreels and art bombarded the citizens in the Third Reich with warnings against Jews and Communists every day – and drew a picture of Nazism as the Germans' salvation and Hitler as the people's saviour. Everything was orchestrated by a tiny, club-footed doctor who lived in Berlin: A fierce Nazi named Joseph Goebbels.

1926-39

1926 Joseph Goebbels is appointed Party leader in Berlin.

1933 The Nazis set up a Propaganda Ministry.

1933 Hitler orders engineers to develop a radio for the Germans.

1939 2,000 men are employed in the Propaganda Ministry.

1926 1933 1939

In 1926, Berlin was a disgrace to the Nazis. Party offices in the suburbs were empty and unmanned. In the streets, the Communists marched without opposition. And in the local election, only 137 Berliners had voted for NSDAP – a number that was lower than the number of Party members in Berlin. If they were to have any hope of seizing power in Germany, the citizens of the country's most populous city had to be converted.

For most of that year, Hitler contemplated who could sell the Party's vision in Berlin. He settled for a 28-year-old National Socialist journalist whom he had met shortly before. Joseph Goebbels was committed and diligent, intelligent and brutal, calculating and spontaneous. Most importantly: An ardent admirer of Hitler.

Newly-elected Dr. Goebbels arrives at the Reichstag. He was the only politician to be interviewed for the radio and share his message.

In November 1926, Goebbels got off the train at the Anhalter railway station in Berlin. 16 years later, the Jews of Berlin would be put on deportation trains here to go to concentration camps, but to Goebbels in the autumn of 1926, the Third Reich purges lay well into the future. He had arrived in Europe's second-largest city, which was prosperous and vibrant. The four million inhabitants lived in a city of contrasts. Immense wealth flourished alongside extreme poverty. Cheery cabarets, film premières and a wild night life dominated by night, while loud Communists were marching in the streets by day. The city was full of neon signs and slogans, and poster men on every street corner were fighting for attention. Berlin was "a pool of sin", Goebbels concluded. He despised the fact that Berlin was a stronghold for Communists and Social Democrats and, not least, the home of the country's largest Jewish community, 180,000 people, who left their mark on the city's cultural and economic life.

SPEECHES HELD ON A TRUCK

Soon after his arrival, Goebbels realised the full extent of his huge task. The first thing he did was to publish a new Party newspaper in Berlin, "Der Angriff" – The Attack. The name was appropriate, as the newspaper was to attack political opponents hard and unremittingly.

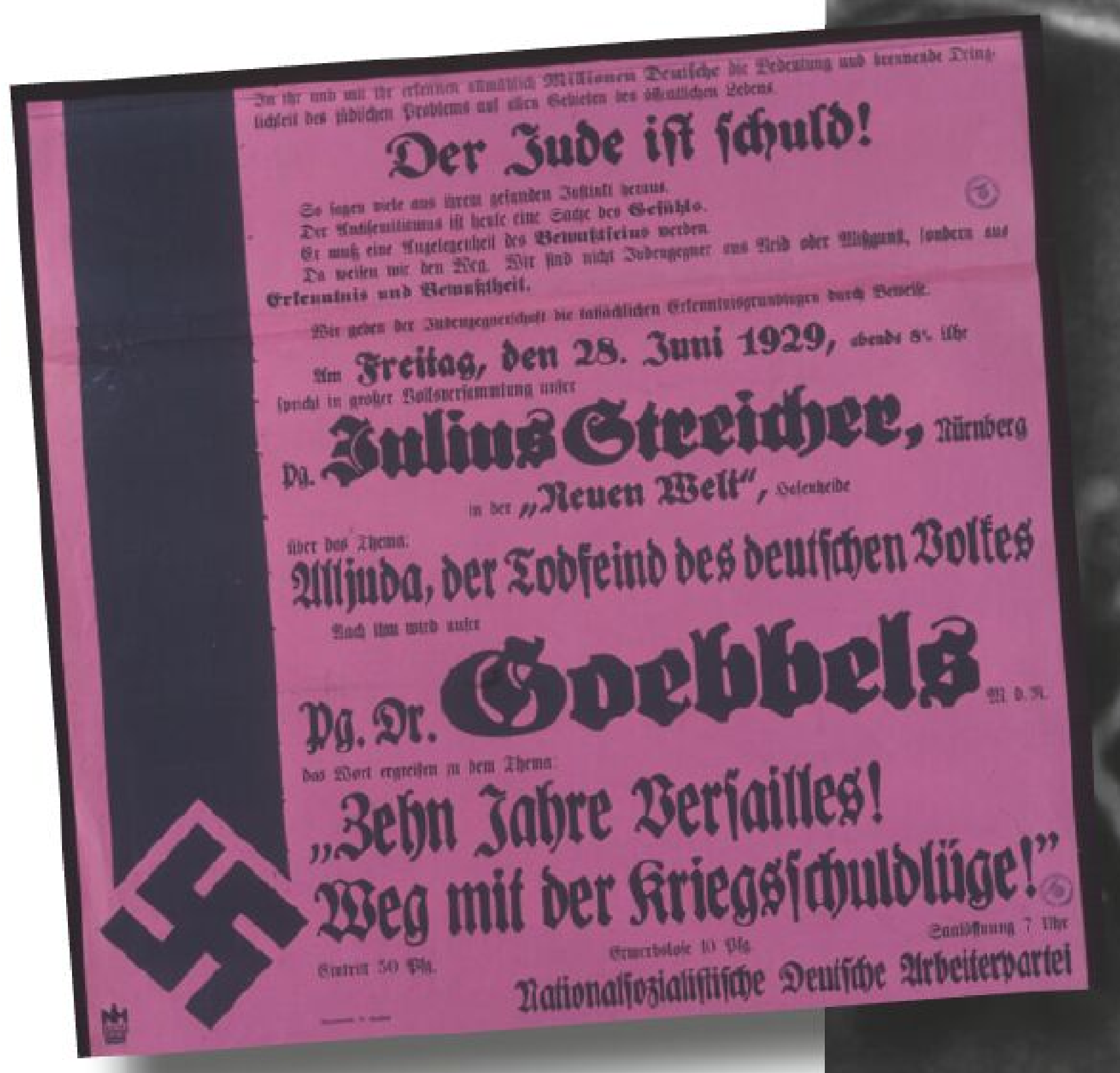
The first editions of the newspaper, in Goebbels' own words, "unfortunately resembled a depressed cheese". Therefore, he decided to drum up a Party orchestra of 40 men, buy an old Opel platform truck and get out in the city to speak. With grandiose music in the streets, the hot-headed doctor attracted attendants before spewing out his hateful talk against everybody: Against the Communists, the middle classes, the upper class, Social Democrats and, not least, Jews. For months, the slight doctor went from school to school and from neighbourhood to neighbourhood to spread poison, sarcasm and hatred for hours. "This small and dark Dr. Goebbels with his fanatical eyes and thin lips", a journalist wrote after having attended a Party meeting.

PROPAGANDA WORKS

The very opportunity to attract attention in the media was precisely what Goebbels was striving for. He gained control over the SA – the Party thugs – and arranged torch-light processions through Communist neighbourhoods to provoke fights.

But Goebbels' real battle field was the speaker's rostrum. With his speeches, he managed to rouse the supporters and tear the enemy to pieces – and several public speaking bans were imposed on him. The ▶

In 1926, Joseph Goebbels, untiringly, spoke in the streets of Berlin to attract voters.



In ihr und mit ihr erkennen allmählich Millionen Deutſche die Bedeutung und brennende Dringlichkeit des jüdiſchen Problems auf allen Gebieten des öffentlichen Lebens.

Der Jude iſt ſchuld!

So ſagen viele aus ihrem geſunden Inſtinkt heraus.
Der Antiſemitismus iſt heute eine Sache des Gefühls.
Er muß eine Angelegenheit des Bewußtſeins werden.
Da weiſen wir den Weg. Wir ſind nicht Judengegner aus Neid oder Mißgunſt, ſondern aus Erkenntnis und Bewußtheit.

Wir geben der Judengegnerſchaft die tatſächlichen Erkenntnisgrundlagen durch Beweiſe.

Am Freitag, den 28. Juni 1929, abends 8½ Uhr
ſpricht in großer Volksverſammlung unſer
Pg. Julius Streicher, Nürnberg
in der „Neuen Welt", Haſenheide
über das Thema:
Alljuda, der Todfeind des deutſchen Volkes
Nach ihm wird unſer
Pg. Dr. Goebbels M. d. R.
das Wort ergreifen zu dem Thema:
„Zehn Jahre Verſailles!
Weg mit der Kriegsſchuldlüge!"
Eintritt 50 Pfg. Erwerbsloſe 10 Pfg. Saalöffnung 7 Uhr
Nationalſozialiſtiſche Deutſche Arbeiterpartei

Early propaganda. Printed on red paper to appeal to Socialist voters

> “Untiringly, the slight doctor went around in his Opel to spread poison, sarcasm and hatred”

newspapers wrote about all the trials, and the Nazi support grew. At the Reichstag election in 1928 – the first election since Goebbels had arrived in Berlin – the Party won 1.6 per cent of the votes in Berlin. This was below the country average, but compared to the starting point a “beautiful success”, as Goebbels noted in his diary. The election won NSDAP 12 mandates in the Reichstag – one of them went to Joseph Goebbels, who now had a steady income and parliamentary immunity.

After the first Reichstag session, a radio journalist was ready to talk to the parliamentarians who came out. Everybody declined except the newly-elected Nazi group chairman: “Dr. Goebbels. A few words, if you please”, the journalist asked, humiliated by the many rejections. Goebbels immediately saw the opportunity to present his views in a nationwide medium: “The time of this Reichstag has ended. I am convinced that is must be dissolved, as it is no longer in accordance with the people's will ”, he proclaimed on the radio. “The biggest joke of democracy is that it is destroyed by the means that it delivers to its mortal enemies”, he sneered.

GOEBBELS CREATES A MARTYR

On 14 January 1930, 22-year-old SA man, Horst Wessel, was shot in his flat. The confrontation was private and concerned the collection of an old debt, but the perpetrator was a Communist. After a month in hospital, Wessel died from blood poisoning. Goebbels arranged a funeral that set the whole city on fire and attracted thousands of attendants.

Standing by Wessel's grave, Goebbels began to talk and eloquently praised Horst Wessel as the Nazi equivalent of Jesus – a “Christian Socialist – divinity is in him”, as he said. Shortly before his death, Wessel had written a poem, “Die Fahne hoch, die Reihen fest geschlossen”, which the Nazis now began to sing, the melody an old sailor's tune. The song was made the Party's official song and renamed the Horst Wessel song. Goebbels himself prepared precise guidelines for when the song was to be sung at election meetings – and at what volume.

Nine months later, the Nazis started the Reichstag election campaign. After his results in Berlin, Joseph Goebbels had been made responsible for the campaign, and inspired by American elections, he organised an election campaign “that had never before been seen” in Germany.

All over the country, walls and lamp posts were filled with election posters, and Goebbels organised a speech command which covered all of Germany by car, preaching Nazi hatred. During the last days of the campaign, he arranged 24 mass meetings in Berlin alone. The result was overwhelming – even to Goebbels. The Nazis stormed into the Reichstag with 107 mandates and, all at once, became a

HATEFUL PARTY PAPERS

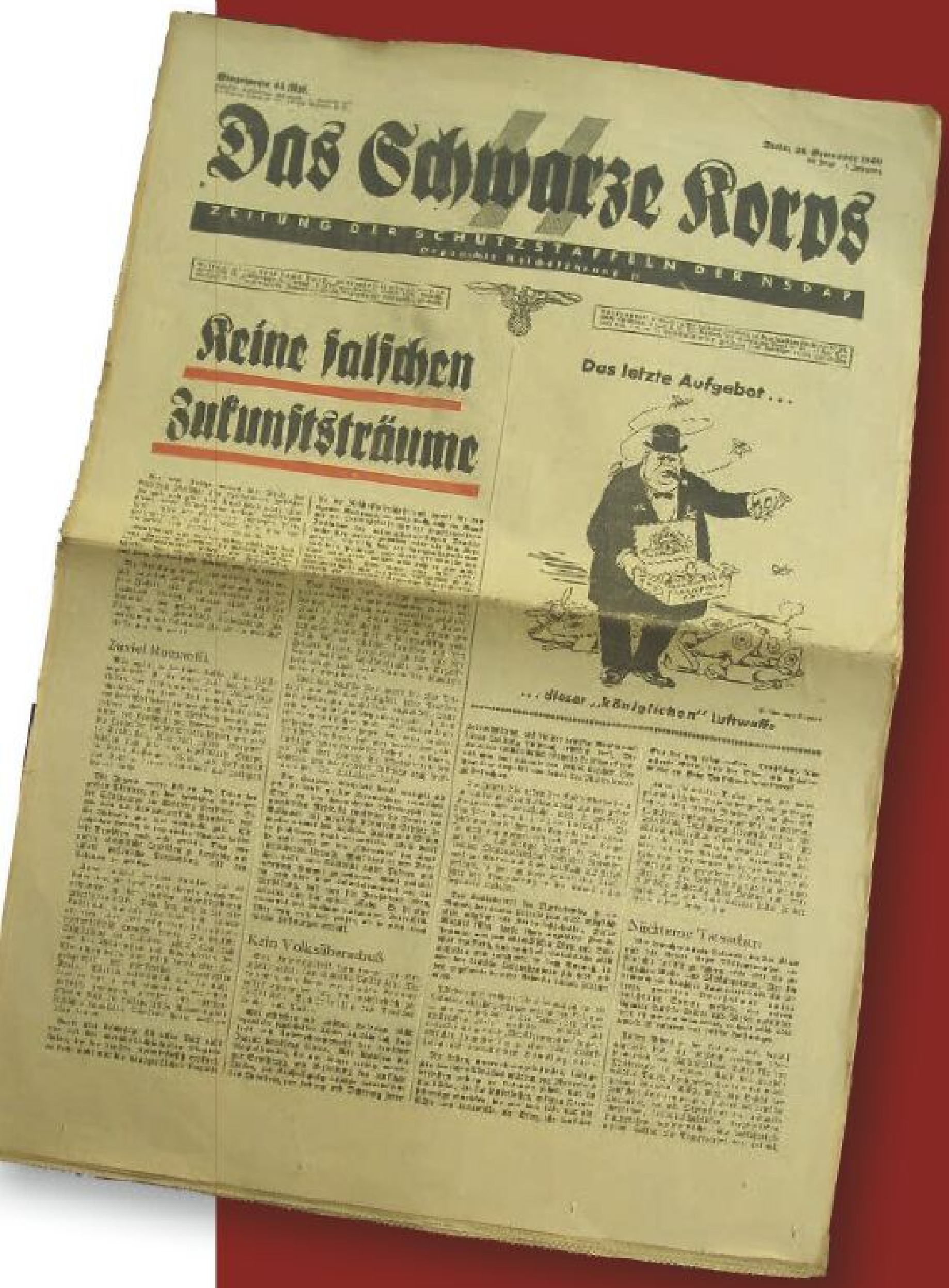
With the purchase of Völkischer Beobachter in 1920, the Nazis entered the German newspaper market. Over the next years, several papers were opened and served as the Party's mouthpice.

Der Stürmer

DER STÜRMER
FOUNDED IN 1923
The tabloid based in Nuremberg overflowed with aggressive anti-Semitism. With caricatures and harsh words, it described Jews as sadistic sex criminals who threatened the pure German blood.

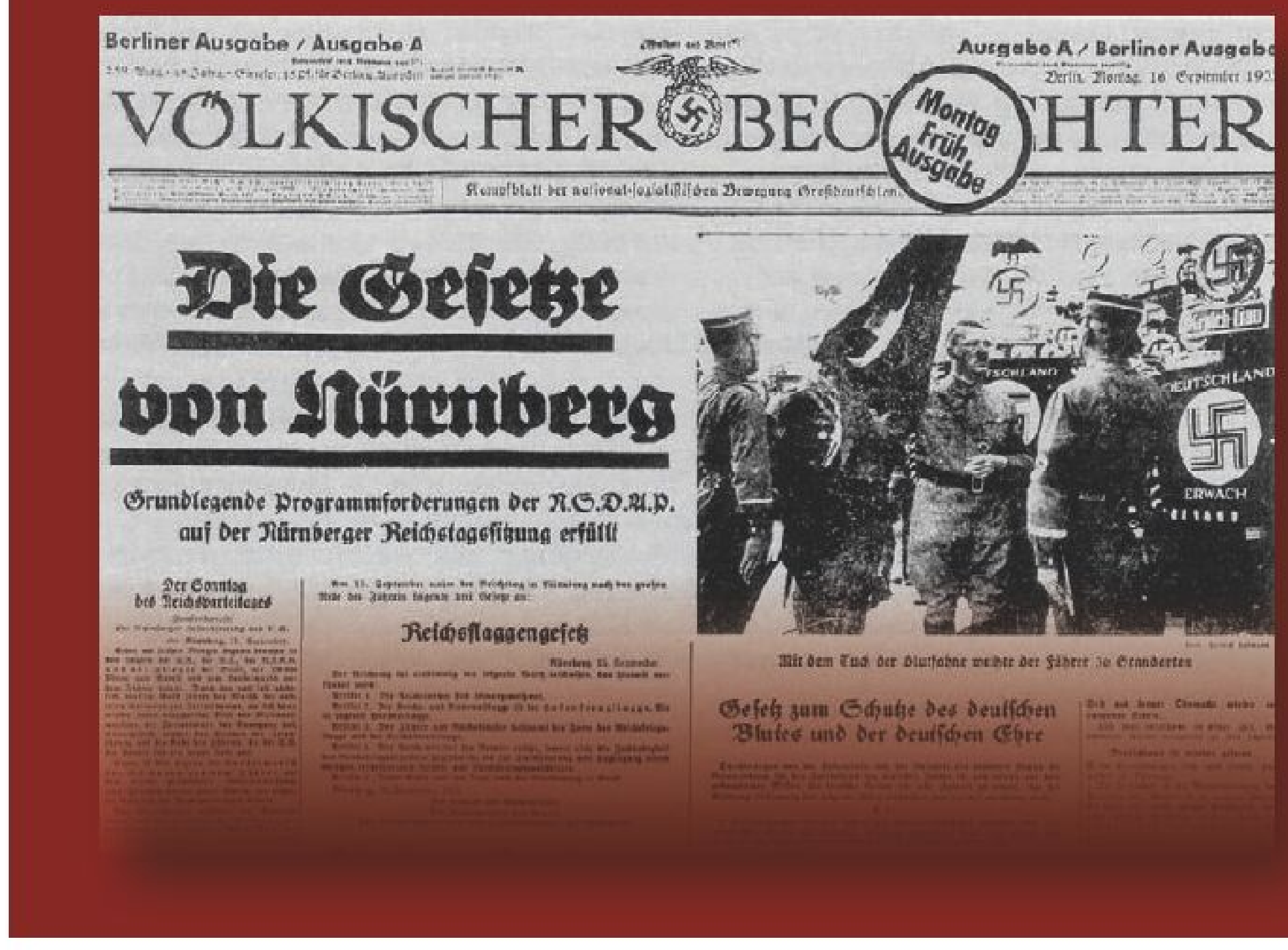
Der Angriff
Zwei SA-Männer ermordet!
Nazi-Sieg in Hessen
Völkischer Beobachter
Die Bayerische „Volks“partei provoziert den Kampf zwischen Bayern und Reich
Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte
Deutsche Vorgeschichte
Reichswart
Der Sonntags-Beobachter
Der Wald in Not
Nationalsozialistische Landpost
Deutscher Rundfunk
Der Bettelbrief des Rundfunkkommissars

DER ANGRIFF
FOUNDED IN 1927
Joseph Goebbels founded Der Angriff, which for 18 years served as the mountpiece in Berlin. The newspaper ruthlessly attacked any opponent.


Das Schwarze Korps
Keine falschen Zukunftsträume
Das letzte Aufgebot . . .

DAS SCHWARZE KORPS
FOUNDED IN 1935
SS members had to to read the official corps paper, which was full of articles about bloodsucking Jews, the threat of Communism and biting remarks about American culture.

VÖLKISCHER BEOBACHTER
FOUNDED IN 1920
With means from a Bavarian manufacturer, the Nazis purchased Völkischer Beobachter, which served as the official Party newspaper. The last edition was published on 29 April 1945.


Berliner Ausgabe / Ausgabe A
Völkischer Beobachter
Montag Früh Ausgabe
Die Gesetze von Nürnberg
Grundlegende Programmforderungen der N.S.D.A.P. auf der Nürnberger Reichstagssitzung erfüllt
Reichsflaggengesetz
Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre

DAS REICH
FOUNDED IN 1940
This newspaper did not contain the same harsh propaganda as the others. Instead, it analysed the progress of war on all battlefields, and described the background for, among other things, the V-1 rocket attacks against London.

> “Goebbels organised an election campaign never seen before in Germany”

On Goebbels’ order, German radio engineers developed a radio for the people. The so-called Volksempfänger ensured that the Nazi leadership could bombard all small German towns with propaganda every day.

powerful force in German politics. In spite of the result, Goebbels was not satisfied. “Only even more grandiose means will make it possible to convert the masses”, he predicted and intensified the propaganda. He was now the official leader of the nation-wide Nazi election campaigns, and in 1932, when Hitler was very close to seizing power, Germany felt the full force of Nazi propaganda.

The established parties considered propaganda to be mean lies and refused to use the Nazi tricks. All the while, Goebbels’ streamlined machine hit the Germans at full force. For the presidential election he arranged the “Hitler over Germany” campaign where the Führer, as the first European politician, flew from city to city to speak to the people. And while Hitler was flying across the country, Goebbels had records produced with his speeches and party songs in a size that allowed them to be put in an envelope and sent out all over Germany.

PRUSSIAN GIRLS PRAISE HITLER

In connection with the Reichstag election in March 1933, Hitler was to address thousands of people in Königsberg. Volunteers filled hills and mountains with “freedom fires” that lit up the dark March night. The Prussian church bells rang, and the SA went in a torchlight procession through the cities, where loudspeaker vans were ready to transmit the Führer’s speech.

Arriving in Königsberg, Hitler was received with fanfares, drum beats and roaring Heil Hitlers. On Goebbels’ order, the Party had provided a group of “blonde children, little East Prussian girls” and equipped them with bunches of flowers to give to Hitler. That evening, no one could avoid listening to Hitler – in the square in Königsberg, via the loudspeaker vans in the streets or on the radio.

Speech corps
Thousands of SA men travelled the country and gave speeches about Party politics.

What was even more important: German TV recorded the entire session and broadcast pictures from it in the newsreels the following weeks. This was total propaganda, and it worked. 17 million Germans voted for the Nazi Party on 5 March – even in the former so difficult Berlin, the Party came first.

MINISTRY GROWS

After the seizure of power, Goebbels could finally reap the fruits of his great work. He took the seat as leader of the newly-created Ministry of Information and Public Enlightenment, with its head office in Berlin. “35 years old and already a minister”, the new propaganda minister happily wrote in his diary.

Goebbels organised his new ministry in several departments, which were responsible for various parts of communication in public life – for example, newspapers and the foreign press, theatres, literature, film industry and art. He was in charge of three heads of department and 350 employees and had a budget of 14 million Reichsmark. Six years later, in 1939, the number of government officials had risen to more than 2,000, and the budget had increas-ed more than tenfold to 187 million Reichsmark.

Goebbels was, however, slightly worried about the ministry’s name. He preferred “Culture and Public Information”, so that the purpose was less obvious, but Hitler persisted. The Führer was passionate about the opportunities offered by propaganda, and in his book, “Mein Kampf”, he had dedicated two chapters to describing the objectives and means of propaganda – without concealing his view on the people:

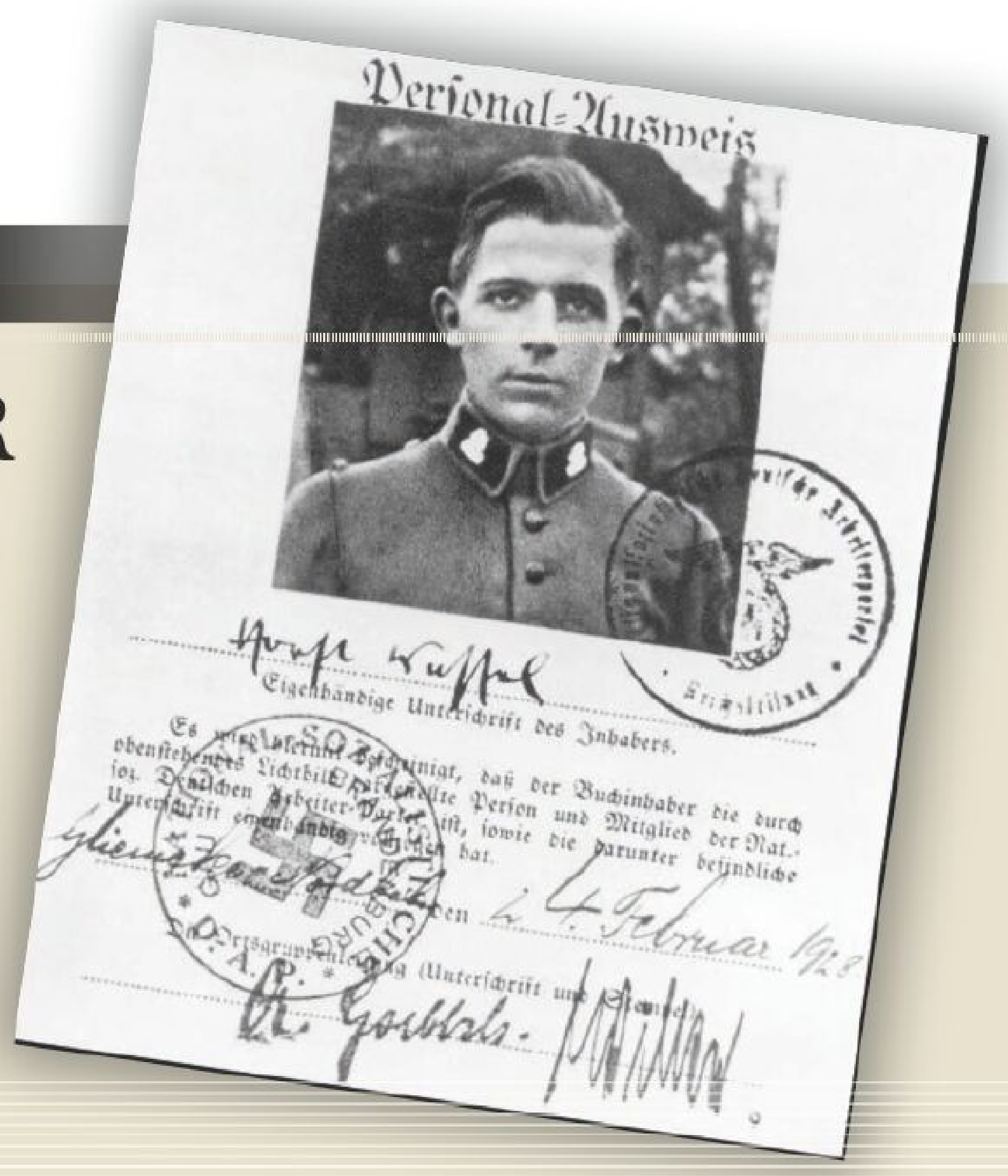
“The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. Consequently, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan”.

Hitler used mass meetings, in particular, as his field of action, where he managed to spellbind huge masses with his powerful speeches. Goebbels, however, developed ▶

HORST WESSEL *1907-1930*

THE NAZI MOVEMENT MARTYR

Law student Horst Wessel enrolled in the Berlin branch of the Nazi Party in 1926. He soon impressed Joseph Goebbels, who promoted the young Wessel to leader of one of the SA troops in the city. In 1929, he gave up his studies and devoted himself to working full-time for the Party. Wessel wrote the Nazi battle song “Die Fahne Hoch”, which can be translated into Keep the flag flying. Wessel was shot in a flat in Berlin by a local Communist, Albrecht Höhler. Höhler was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment, while Wessel was made a saint in the Nazi movement. At the seizure of power, “Die Fahne Hoch” became the second official German national anthem, and at the huge annual gatherings in Nuremberg, the Nazis honoured Wessel. Albrecht Höhler was killed by the Gestapo in 1933.



Perſonal-Ausweis

Horſt Weſſel
Eigenhändige Unterſchrift des Inhabers.

Es wird hiermit beſcheinigt, daß der Buchinhaber die durch obenſtehendes Lichtbild dargeſtellte Perſon und Mitglied der Nat.-ſoz. Deutſchen Arbeiter-Partei iſt, ſowie die darunter befindliche Unterſchrift eigenhändig vollzogen hat.

den 4. Februar 1928
Ortsgruppenleitung (Unterſchrift und Stempel)
Dr. Goebbels

Leader of SA troop 34 – wrote the lyrics to the Party battle song – Nazi martyr techniques that reached Germans in every conceivable life situation – and he warned against turning propaganda into a science – rather, it was a skill comprising various tools, each fitting for a particular situation:

"It makes no sense to discuss propaganda: It is not a theoretical matter. Propaganda is good if it leads to the desired result, but bad if it fails to achieve the intended success", he said.

LEATHER JACKET REPLACED

With the seizure of power in 1933, Goebbels' opportunities for steering the public opinion grew explosively – but his role changed in character. So far, his job had been to ensure that the Party was mentioned in the newspapers and to rouse Party supporters with marches and mass meetings, but now, he had become part of the State. The objective was to maintain power and develop the Nazi State and ideals.

Goebbels therefore removed his long leather jacket, which he had been wearing during his years as a street fighter. Now, he dressed like a statesman in suits and surrounded himself with noble adjutants. The propaganda, too, became more subdued, as Goebbels no longer had to make himself heard above the opponents. He merely needed to maintain the Germans' illusions about the excellence of Nazism to ensure that they did not rebel. He ensured calm by only providing the Germans with the news and information that the Nazis wanted.

A new act prohibited the Germans from listening to foreign radio stations, and all German newspapers were under strict censorship. The newspapers received guidelines from the Propaganda Ministry about subjects not to be written about. The so-called Editor-in-Chief Act from 1936, where all editors-in-chief were hired and paid by the Nazis, ensured strict Party control of all editorial offices. Journalists had to be Aryan, "politically reliable" and have at least one year's training. Jewish journalists were fired with immediate effect. Approx. 1,300 journalists lost their jobs.

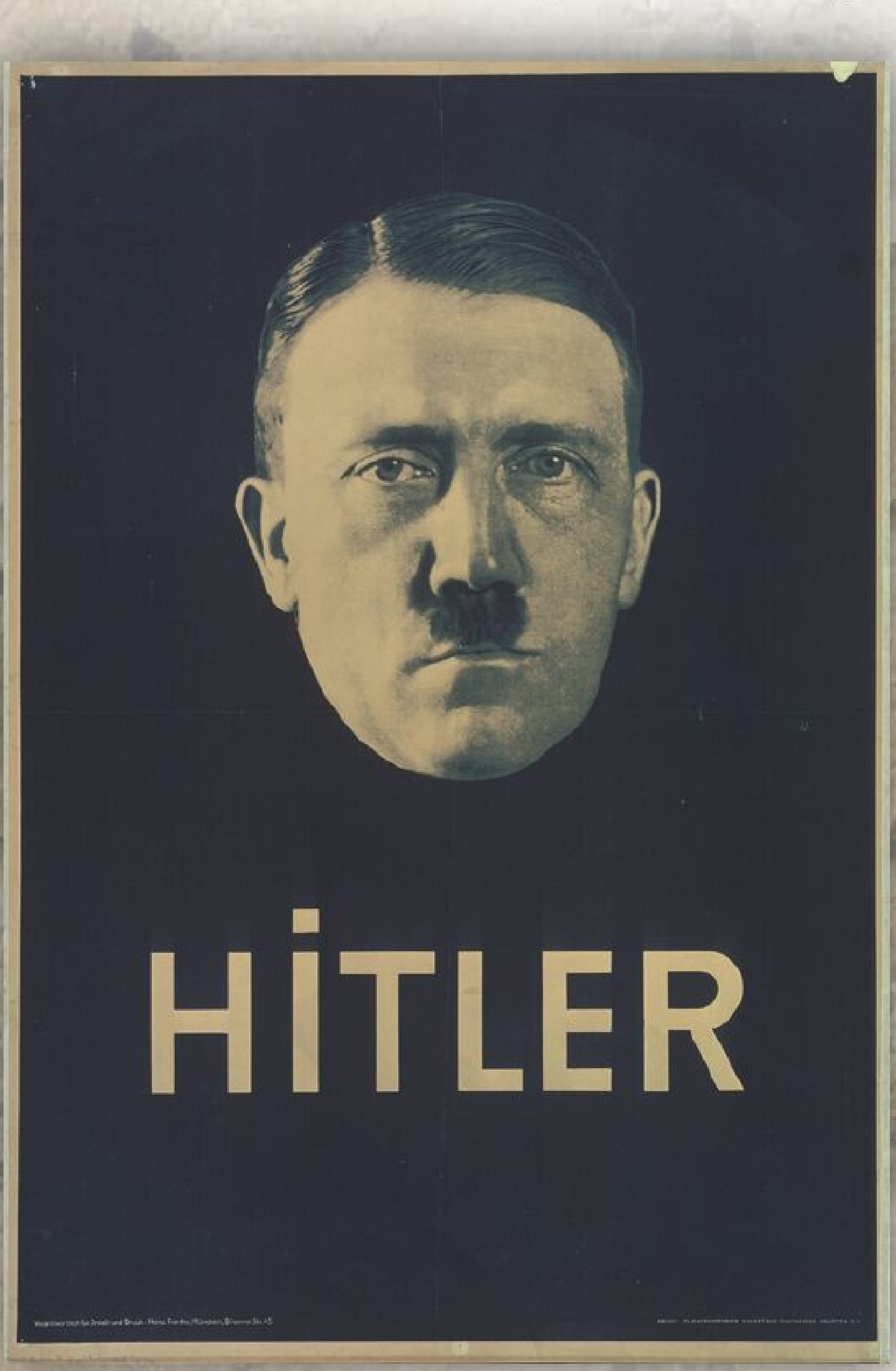
GOEBBELS WANTS POP MUSIC

More important than newspapers was the radio – the most efficient mass medium of the time. Before 1933, every German Land had its own radio station which local Nazi leaders expected to take over after the seizure of power. But Hitler and Goebbels realised that they risked losing power if local Party members were given free speaking time, and the radio stations came under the Propaganda Ministry as one.

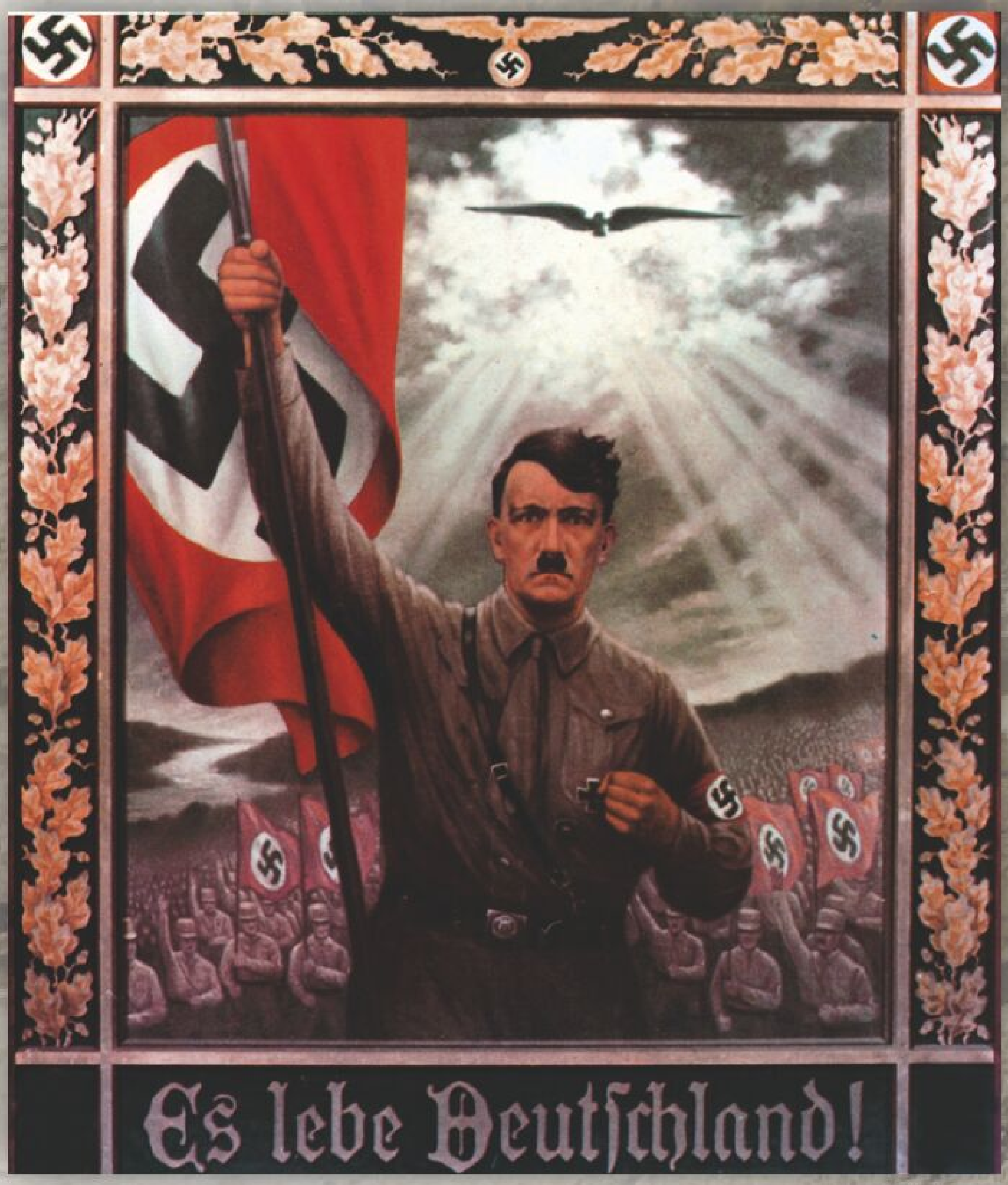
Goebbels was aware that the Reichs Radio was not to develop into an uninteresting transmitter of party news. Therefore, he ordered for hours of popular music to be played and as much live commentary as possible. The radio had to become popular so that the Germans would also listen when the Nazis spoke. ▶

PROPAGANDA POSTERS

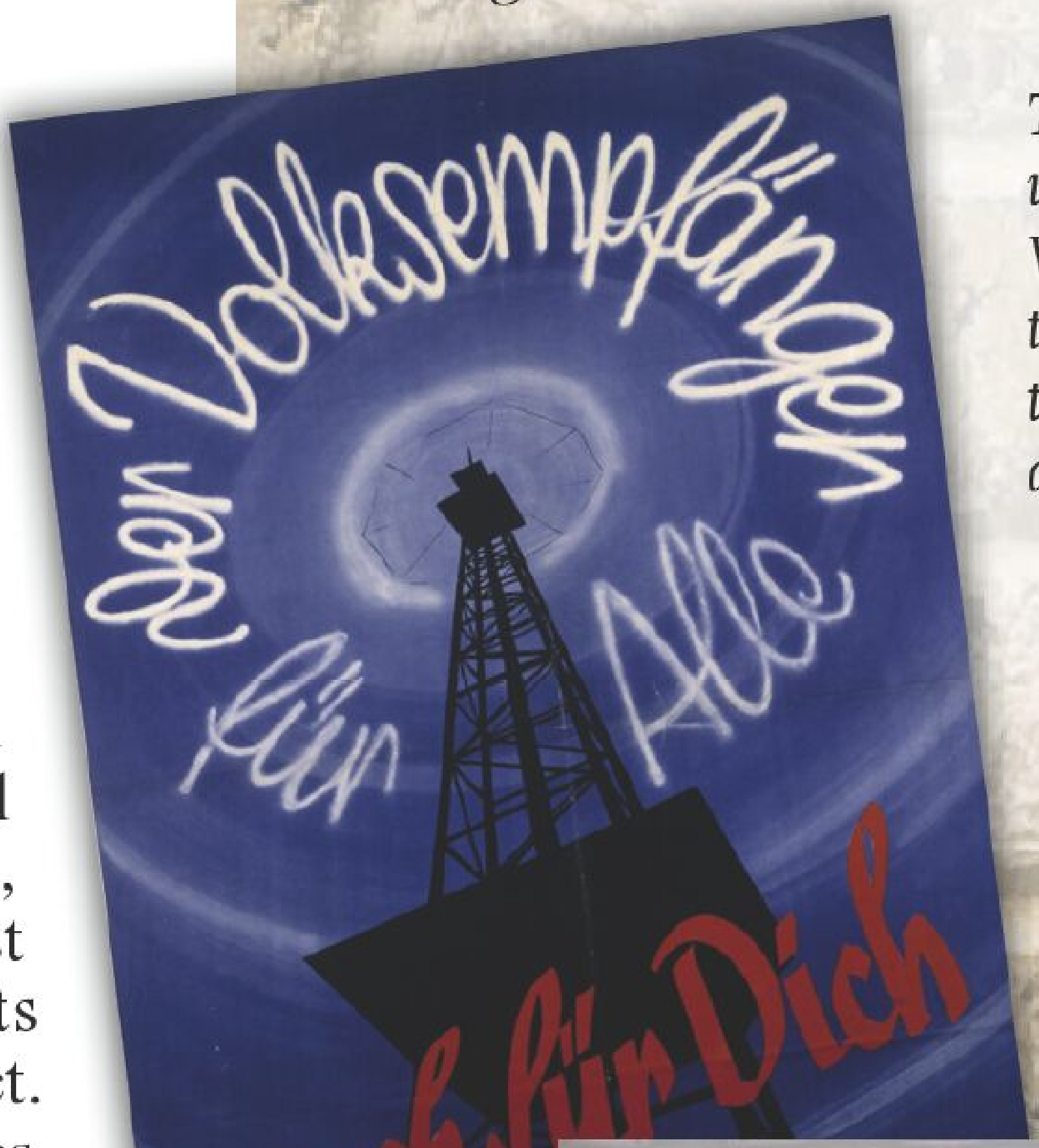
Under Goebbels' leadership, Nazi poster propaganda changed in nature. From densely written pamphlets for the politically interested to simple messages aimed at the masses.



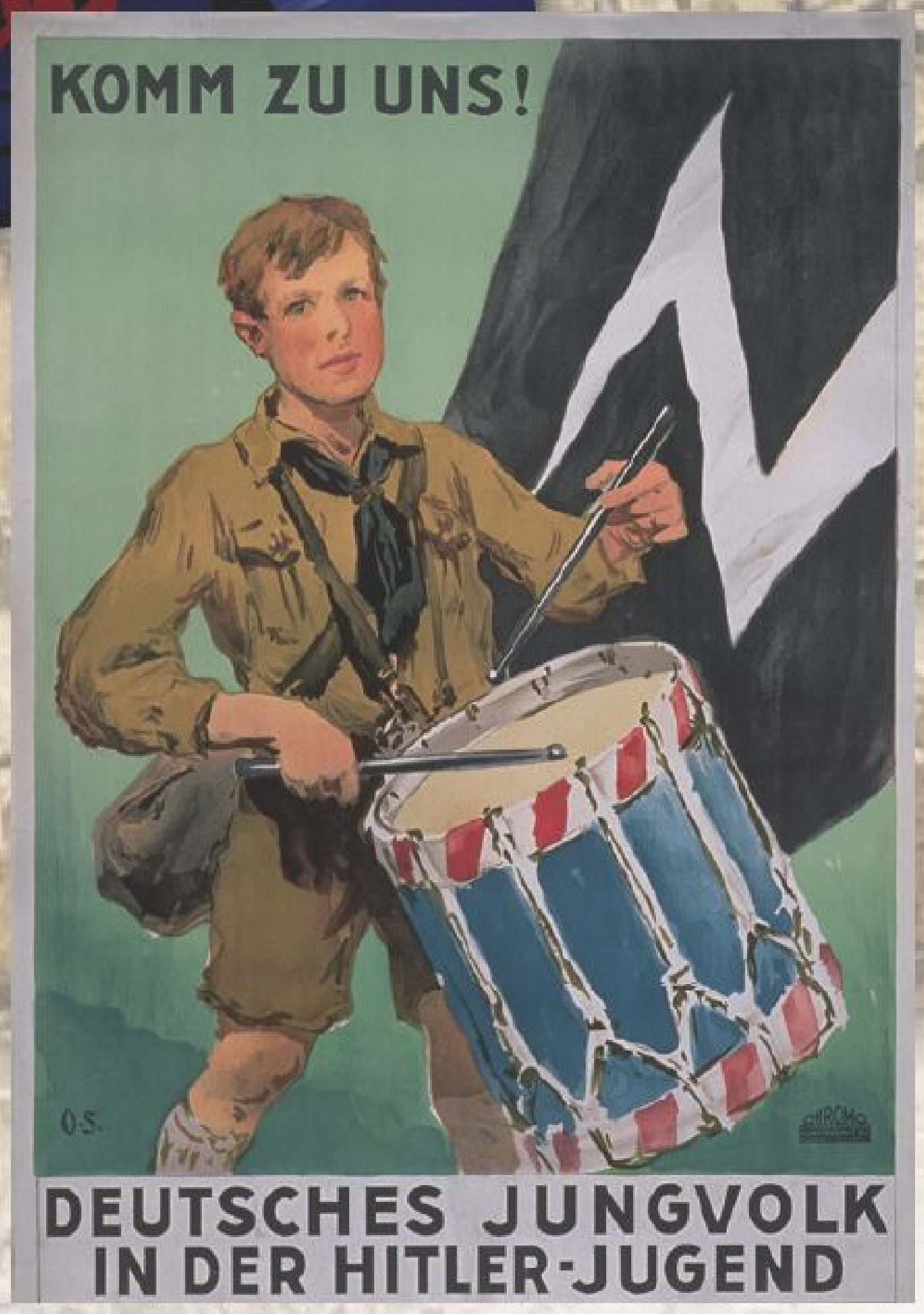
The 1932 election campaign was dominated by colourful posters. To stand out, Goebbels made a very simple poster, where only Hitler's name and face adorned the black background.


Es lebe Deutſchland!

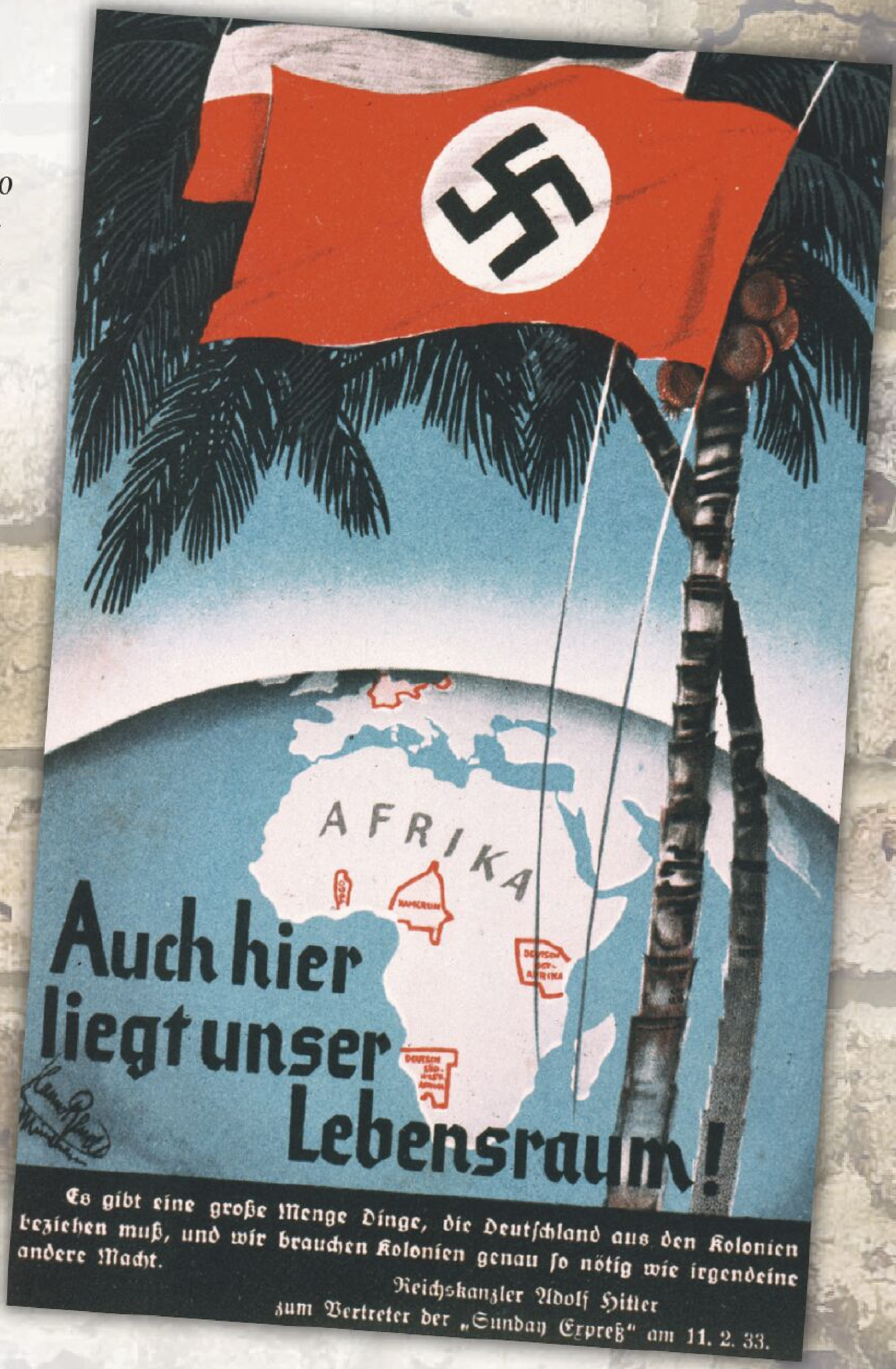
The iconic poster from 1936 portrays Hitler as Germany's Messiah. Behind him, the German eagle descends from the heaven, sent from God.



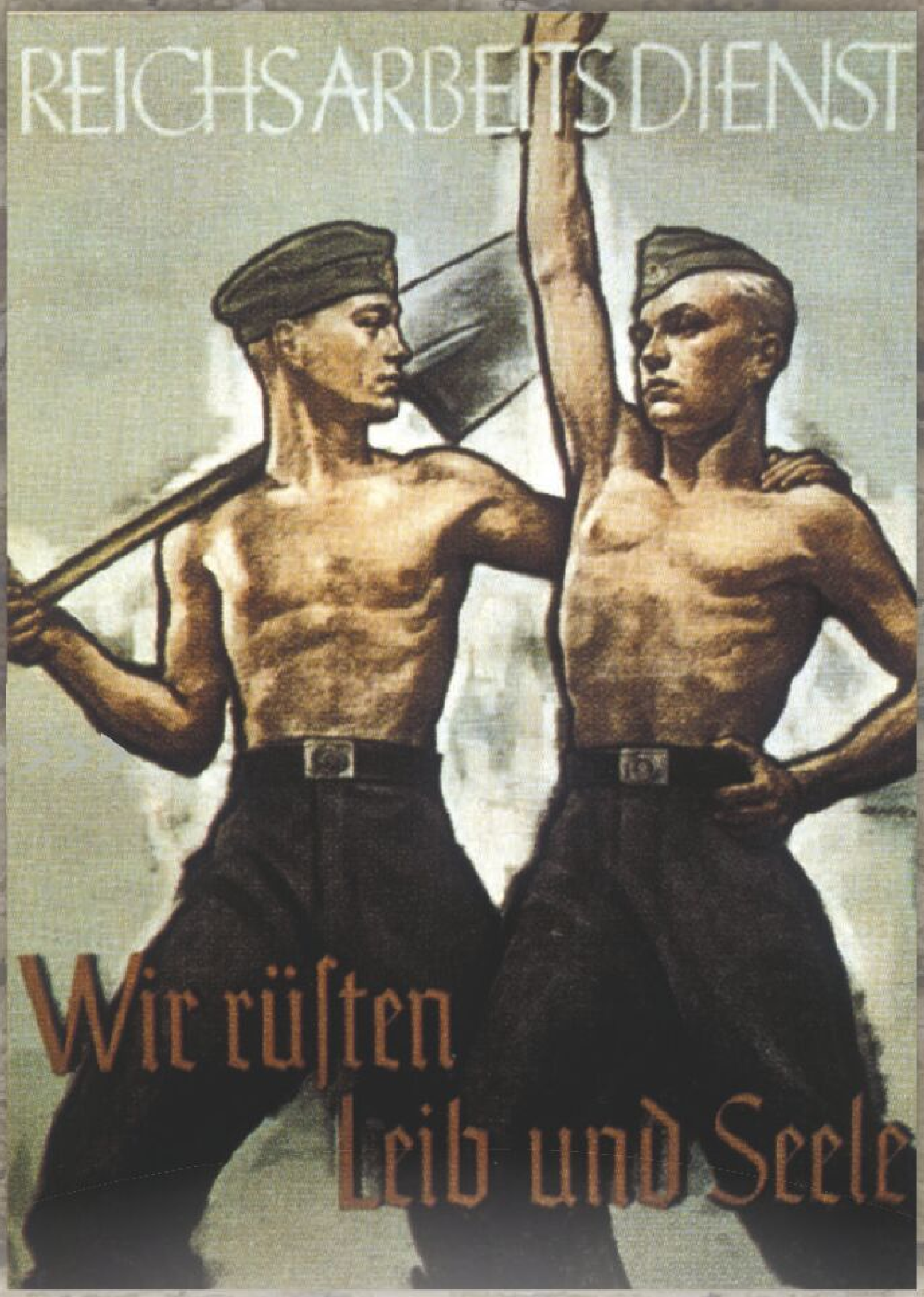
The Germans were urged to get a Volksemp-fänger so that they could listen to the regime's announcements.



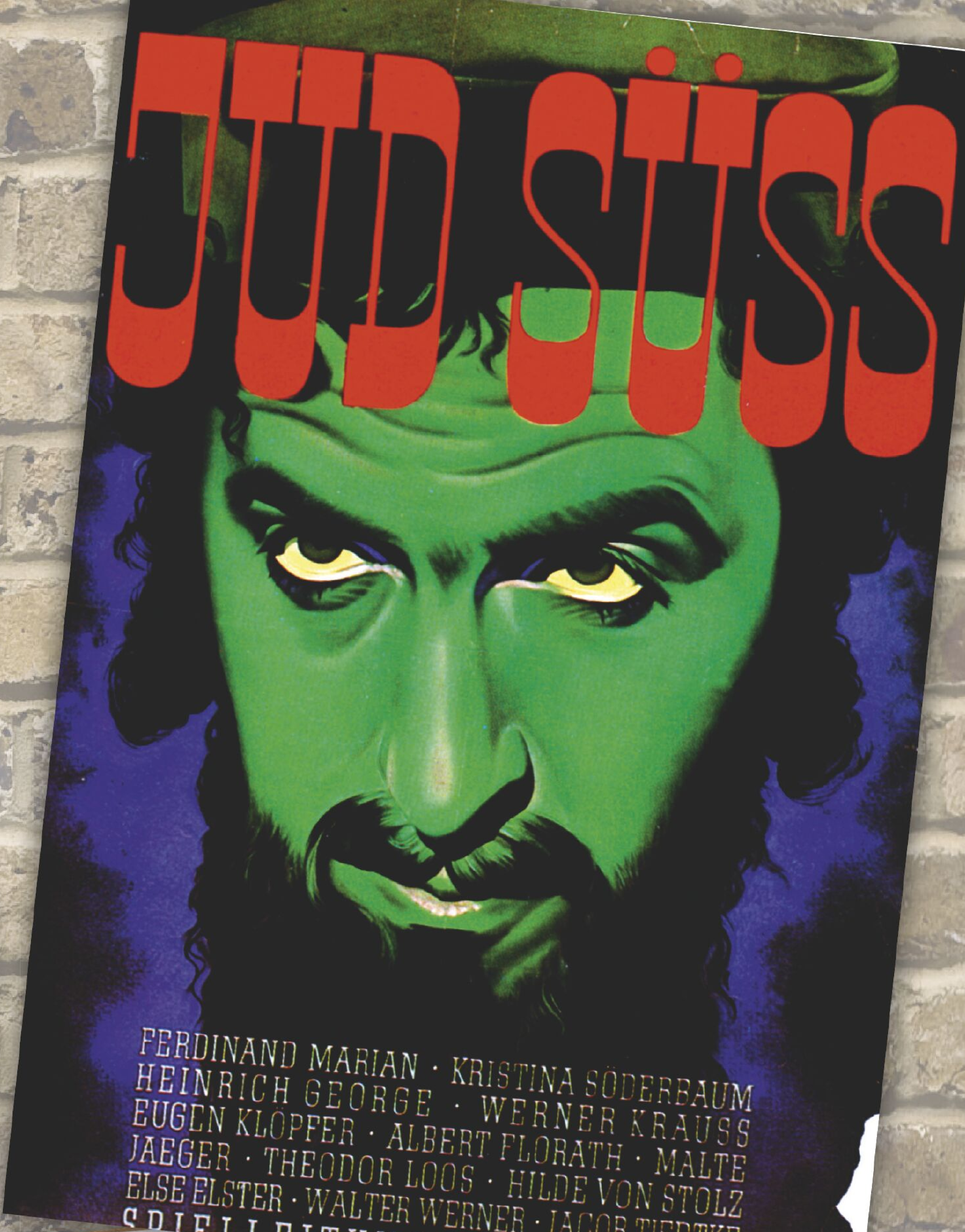
"Komm zu uns" – come to us – was the slogan of the Hitler Youth recruitment offices.


AFRIKA
Auch hier liegt unser Lebensraum!
Es gibt eine große Menge Dinge, die Deutſchland aus den Kolonien beziehen muß, und wir brauchen Kolonien genau ſo nötig wie irgendeine andere Macht.
Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler
zum Vertreter der „Sunday Expreß" am 11. 2. 33.

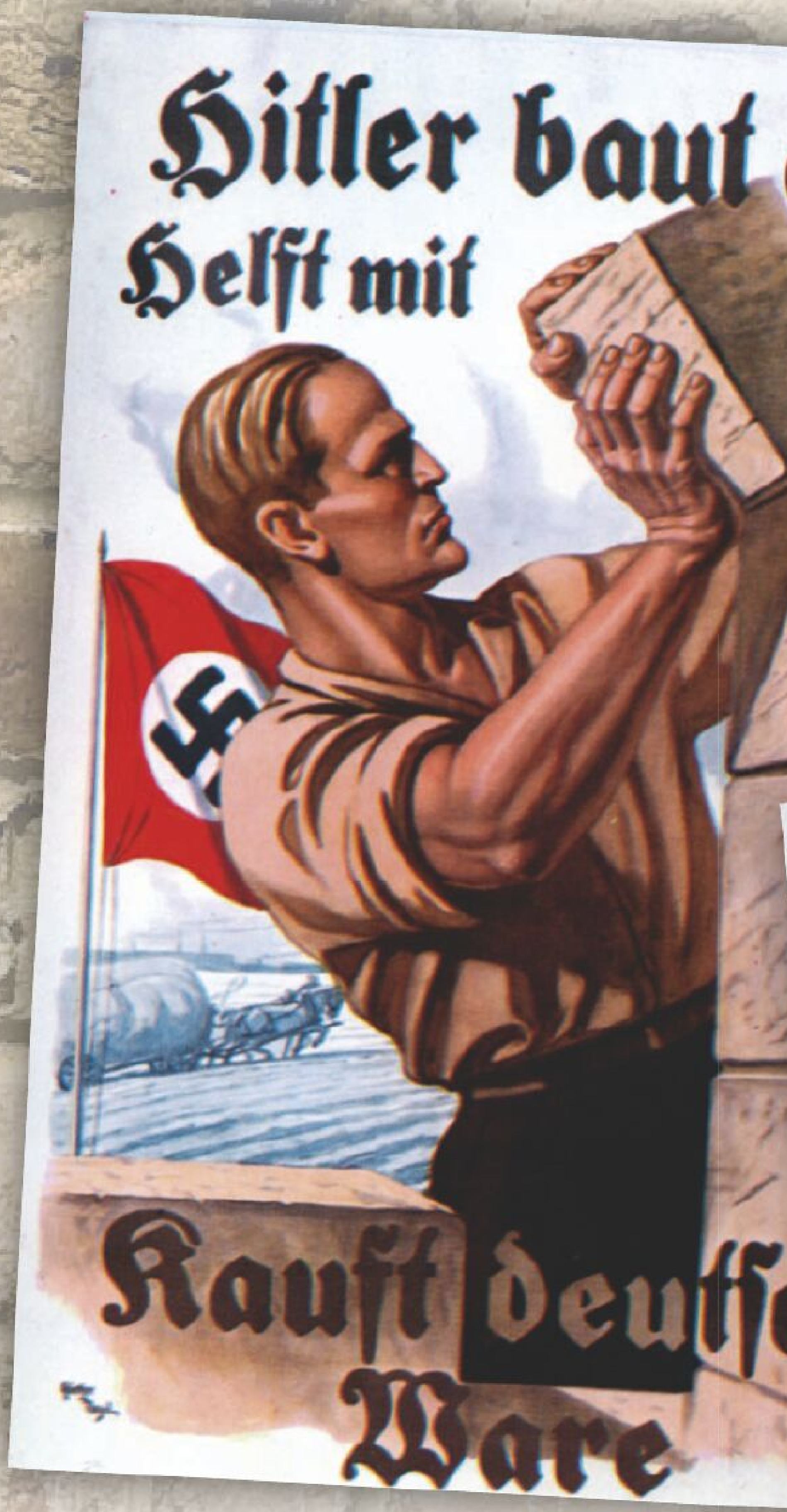
The Propaganda Ministry bombarded the population with Hitler's demand for Lebensraum. This poster demands the former German colonies in Africa be returned to the Reich.


REICHSARBEITSDIENST
Wir rüſten
Leib und Seele

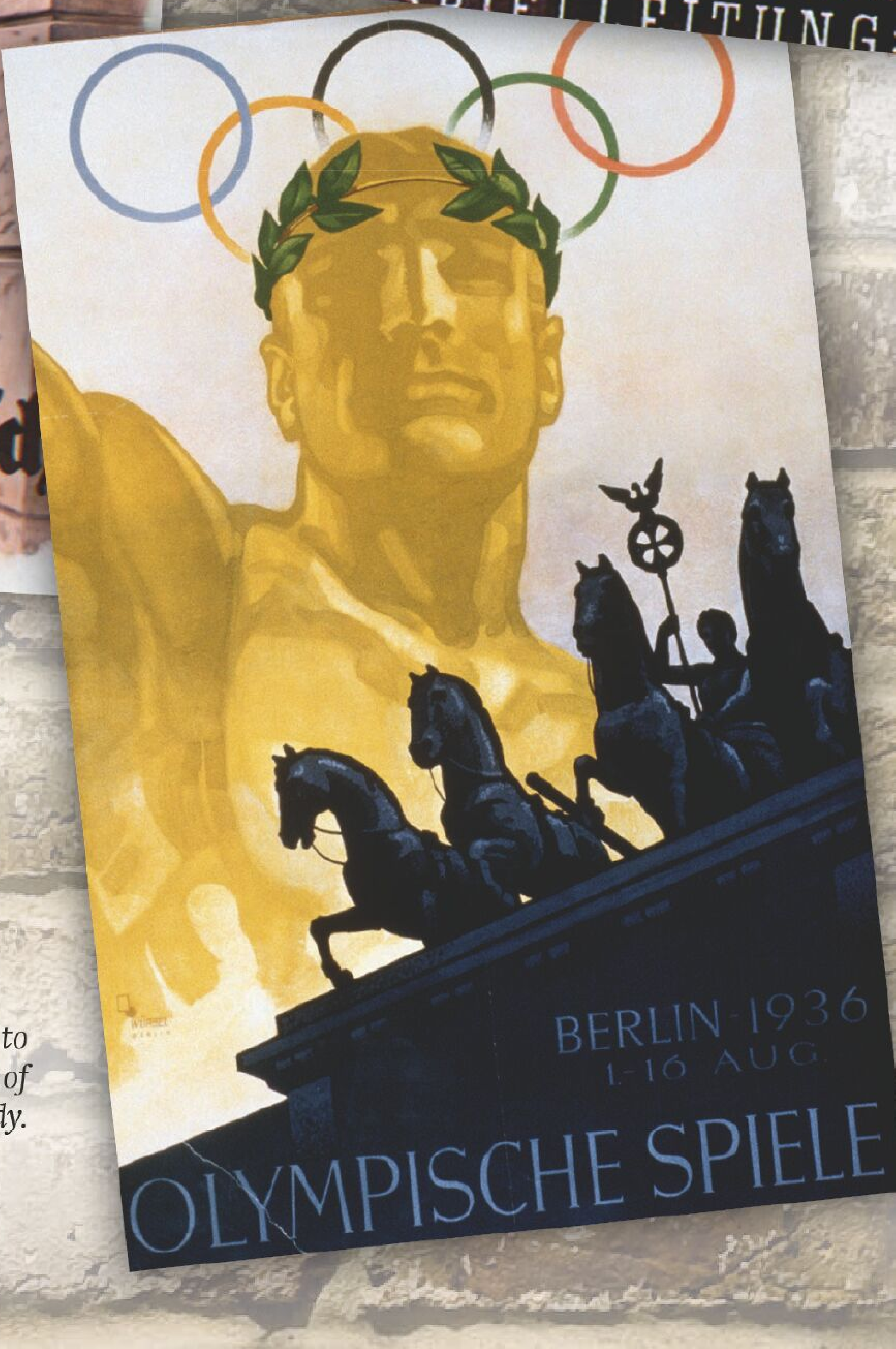
"We arm the body and soul", the Reichsarbeitsdienst poster announced. Forced labour in the service was sold as a golden opportunity to grow strong and strengthen Germany.


JUD SÜSS
FERDINAND MARIAN · KRISTINA SÖDERBAUM
HEINRICH GEORGE · WERNER KRAUSS
EUGEN KLÖPFER · ALBERT FLORATH · MALTE
JAEGER · THEODOR LOOS · HILDE VON STOLZ
ELSE ELSTER · WALTER WERNER · JACOB TIEDTKE
SPIELLEITUNG: VEIT HARLAN

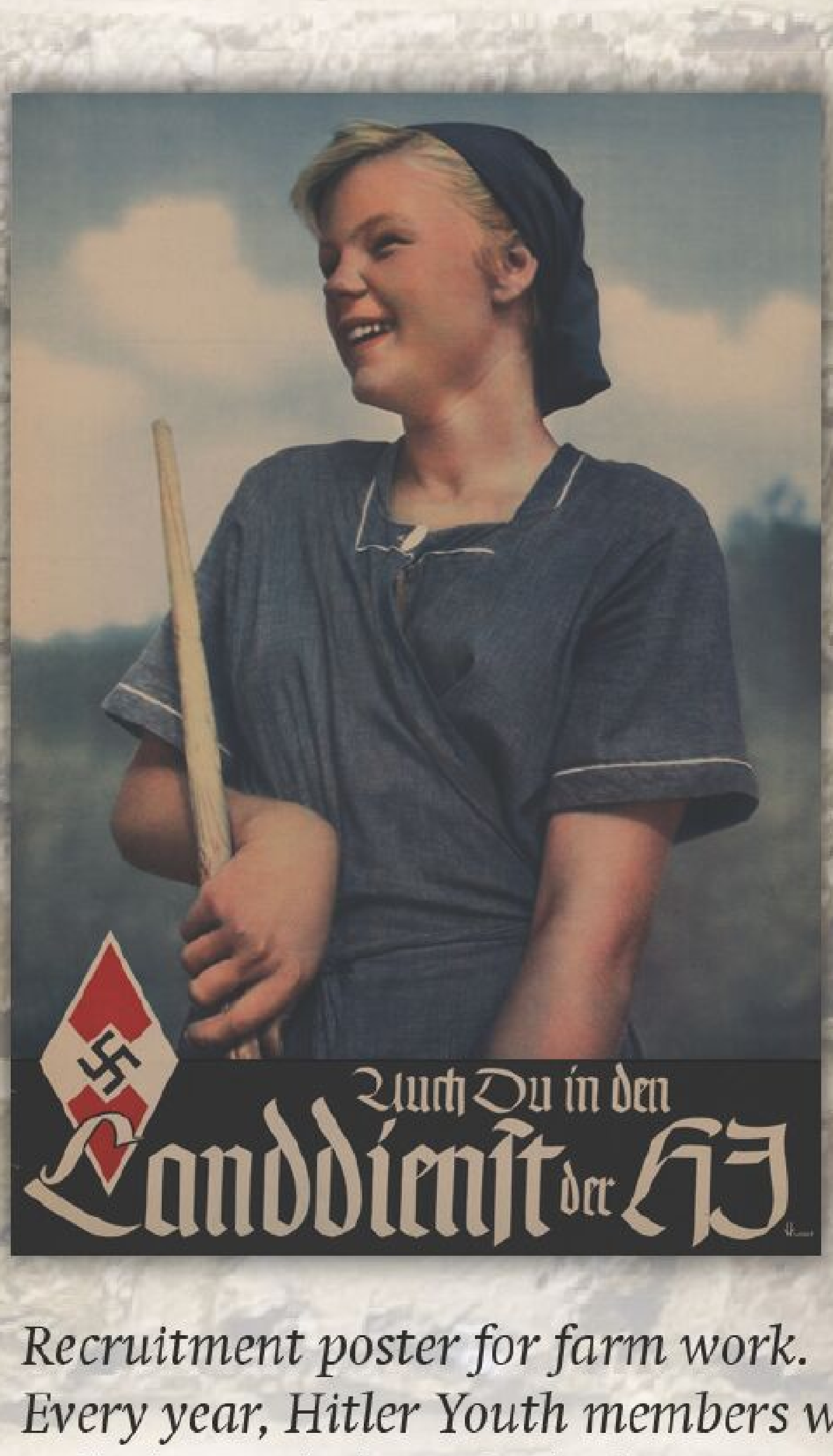
Poster for the very anti-Semitic "Jud Süss" from 1940. The film was watched by more than 20 million Germans.


Hitler baut auf
Helft mit
Kauft deutſche
Ware

To ensure self-sufficiency, the nation was called on to only purchase German goods – and reminded about the economic recovery that Hitler was responsible for.


BERLIN 1936
1-16 AUG
OLYMPISCHE SPIELE

The 1936 Olympic Games were used to sell the Nazi view of the importance of building a perfect and healthy body.


Auch Du in den
Landdienſt der HJ

Recruitment poster for farm work. Every year, Hitler Youth members were called on to help with the harvest.

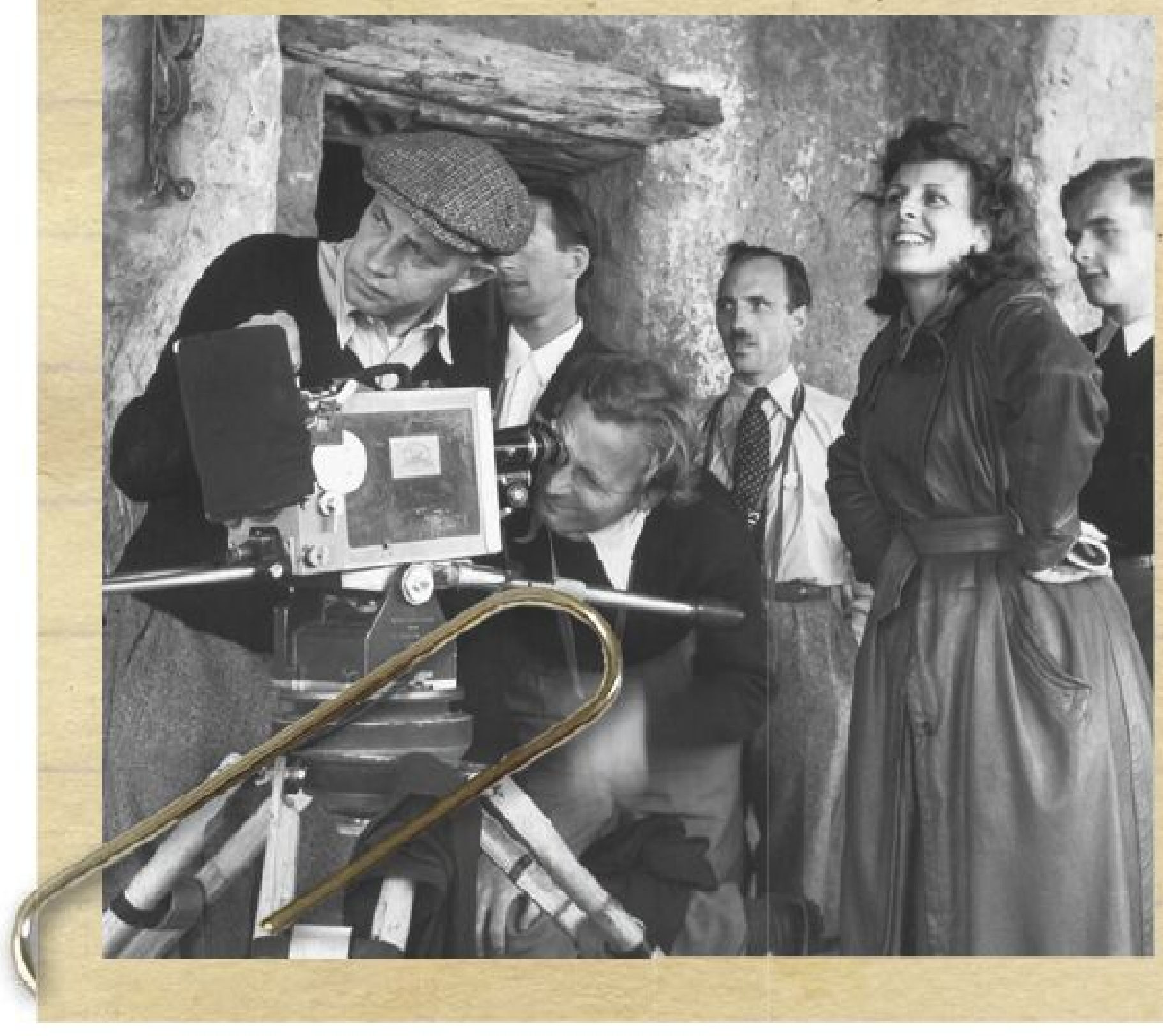
Censorship and condemnation also hit many of the great painters of the time. In great travelling exhibitions, the Nazis showed their "degenerate" art to allow the Germans themselves to study the "cultural decline". Hitler and Goebbels visited one of the exhibitions together in 1938. For two hours they walked among the pictures – in their own words – shocked:

"Not one picture finds favour. The Führer agrees that they must be confiscated without compensation. We will exchange some of them for good masters abroad", Goebbels wrote in his diary.

While the Führer did not hide his interest in art, Goebbels' great passion was film. He knew that the general public did not listen to his political indoctrination – it had to be addressed with much greater subtlety. So the film industry experienced great expansions, and the Propaganda Minister took an active part in the projects.

A pleasant sideline business of his position was the fact that he could quite openly make passes on the actresses since he held the power to determine their career. If they did not willingly lie down on his "casting couch", the moviemaking would stop at once. Only few dared to say no, and in the film studios outside Berlin, the Minister always went by the name "The Goat of Babelsberg". In the late 1930s, anti-Jewish films hit the German cinemas, including "Jud Süss" and "The Eternal Jew". The films portrayed the Jews as a thievish and murderous people and were an unpleasant omen of the fate that would hit the European Jews within a few years.

Before the start of World War II, propaganda played a central role in the preparations for war. Hitler ordered Goebbels to create a portrayal of Poland as an aggressive country, whose soldiers kept attacking German border troops. This paved the way for the German people's acceptance of the attack in September 1939. To Goebbels personally, the war became an opportunity to develop his propaganda project. In the last days of the war, he considered it a personal victory that the citizens in the formerly so stubborn Berlin kept fighting the Soviet superior force. Goebbels killed himself on 1 May 1945 – the day after Hitler had committed suicide.



Romance films were most popular

Almost 1,500 actors, directors and photographers left Germany when the Nazis seized power. Nevertheless, Goebbels managed to maintain the film produc-tion in the country, and until the end of the war, 1,086 feature films were launched.

After the war, propaganda films such as Leni Riefenstahl's film about the Olympics (1936) and "The Eternal Jew" (1940) have attracted most comment, but the majority were comedies and love films – which many Germans went to watch in the cinemas.

> Hitler ordered Goebbels to create a portrayal of Poland as aggressive and whose soldiers attacked German border troops

"I love him", wrote Goebbels about Hitler in 1926 and made it his main task to impress the Nazi rhetoric on the Germans.

Hermann Göring

FLYING ACE AND WAR CRIMINAL

After the Nazi Party seized power in Germany in 1933, Hermann Göring quickly built the Luftwaffe into a formidable offensive weapon for Hitler. But he also helped the Führer realise his plans for the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question".

Text: **CHRISTER BERGSTRÖM**

Hungarian Jews arrive in Auschwitz, one of the concentration camps built on the orders of Hermann Göring.

BUNDESARCHIV 183-N0827-318

Göring headed up the German air force, the Luftwaffe, and was one of Hitler's closest associates.

ULLSTEIN BILD DTL / GETTY

"Lützow, I'll have you shot!" exclaimed Luftwaffe commander Hermann Göring, frothing with rage after being criticised by Günther Lützow, one of Nazi Germany's best fighter pilots.

They were meeting in early January 1945, during a period of crisis in which they could both foresee the total collapse of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich within a few months. Nowhere was the crisis greater than within the Luftwaffe, whose fighter jets had completely failed to defend German cities and industry against the Allies' devastating bombing raids.

Lützow was the spokesperson for a group of high-ranking fighter pilots who'd requested a meeting with Hermann Göring to present their criticism. The tipping point had been Göring's dismissal of the *General der Jagdflieger* (inspector of fighters), the famous Lieutenant General Adolf Galland, one of the country's greatest pilots. Göring turned again to Lützow, shouting that it was a "mutiny without parallel in history".

BUNDESARCHIV 146-2006-0126

Günther Lützow

Neither Göring nor any other of the Nazi Party leaders welcomed criticism from their subordinates, least of all in a difficult situation like this.

How different everything had been when Hermann Göring himself was a young, famous fighter pilot in World War I. It was a time to which he constantly yearned to return.

BORN IN 1893, Göring had grown up in the medieval Veldenstein Castle, bought for his parents by Hermann's godfather, Hermann Epenstein. Life in the castle fired the young Göring's imagination and inspired him to choose a military career. He fought enthusiastically in World War I in 1914, but was soon hampered by rheumatism in both knees. So, he joined the air force instead.

Göring soon proved to be talented as both a fighter pilot and a commander. In the spring of 1917, he was commissioned to take command of the demoralised Jasta 27 fighter squadron. Its pilots had recently had nothing but setbacks. Göring managed to reverse this trend through his own personal example. Within a few months of becoming commander, the unit had shot down 35 enemy aircraft – Göring personally accounted for 16 of them. In 1918, he was awarded the highest medal for bravery, Pour le Mérite, commonly known as the "Blue Max", and took command of the squadron that Manfred von Richthofen – 'The Red Baron' – had led before his death.

AFTER WORLD WAR I, Göring began working in civil aviation. At the end of 1919, he got a job as a pilot at the newly formed Swedish Air Transport Company and settled in Stockholm.

The young captain alternated commercial flights with private charters. On one of the latter, in

Hermann Göring (back seat) with his friend Bruno Loerzer (front seat) in a reconnaissance aircraft, the Aviatik BI 1914. It was Loerzer who convinced Göring to join the air force.

ULLSTEIN BILD DTL/GETTY

Hitler, Göring and Joseph Goebbels.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES, US

Hatred and intrigue in the Nazis' top echelons

★ Hermann Göring was deeply involved in the intrigue that existed between the high-ranking Nazis closest to Hitler, which was mainly caused by the dictator's tactic of divide and conquer. Among other things, Göring was involved in planning the assassination of SA leader Ernst Röhm during "The Night of the Long Knives" in 1934, he outmanoeuvred Commander-in-Chief von Blomberg by defaming him for immoral living, and he waged a veritable war against the Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. But none was a more dangerous opponent than Hitler's personal secretary, Martin Bormann. There was a mutual hatred between Bormann and Göring, which ended during the last days of the war with Bormann managing to get Göring sentenced to death in his absence.

February 1920, he flew the wealthy nobleman Eric von Rosen from Stockholm to his estate, Rockelstad, near Flen, in Sweden. Göring was invited to stay overnight, and there the German pilot made a life-changing acquaintance: von Rosen's 31-year-old sister-in-law, Carin von Kantzow. Although married with a son, von Kantzow fell instantly in love with the German aviator, and began a scandal-ridden relationship with him.

At this point, Göring was living in Stockholm, but in the summer of 1920, he and von Kantzow moved to Munich, where they married in February 1923 following her divorce. It was then that Göring joined the Nazi Party – a movement that had won supporters from among the many Germans who felt betrayed about how World War I had ended

Carin was suffering from heart disease and in order for her to receive care, they returned to Stockholm in August 1923. Shortly afterwards, Göring temporarily travelled to Munich to take part in the Nazis' failed coup attempt, the Beer Hall Putsch, on 9th November 1923. But it didn't go as the Nazis had intended – at least, not at first. The coup was crushed, Hitler was imprisoned, and Göring narrowly escaped with a gunshot wound to the groin. It was while being treated for the injury in an Austrian hospital that he developed an addiction to morphine.

In March 1925, Hermann and Carin settled at 23 Odengatan, Stockholm. In late summer 1925, he was admitted to hospital for detox and eventually ended up at Långbro mental hospital, which treated people for addiction. Göring was discharged a few months later in October 1925, having freed himself from his dependency, and took up work as a representative for the German Heinecke parachute company in Sweden.

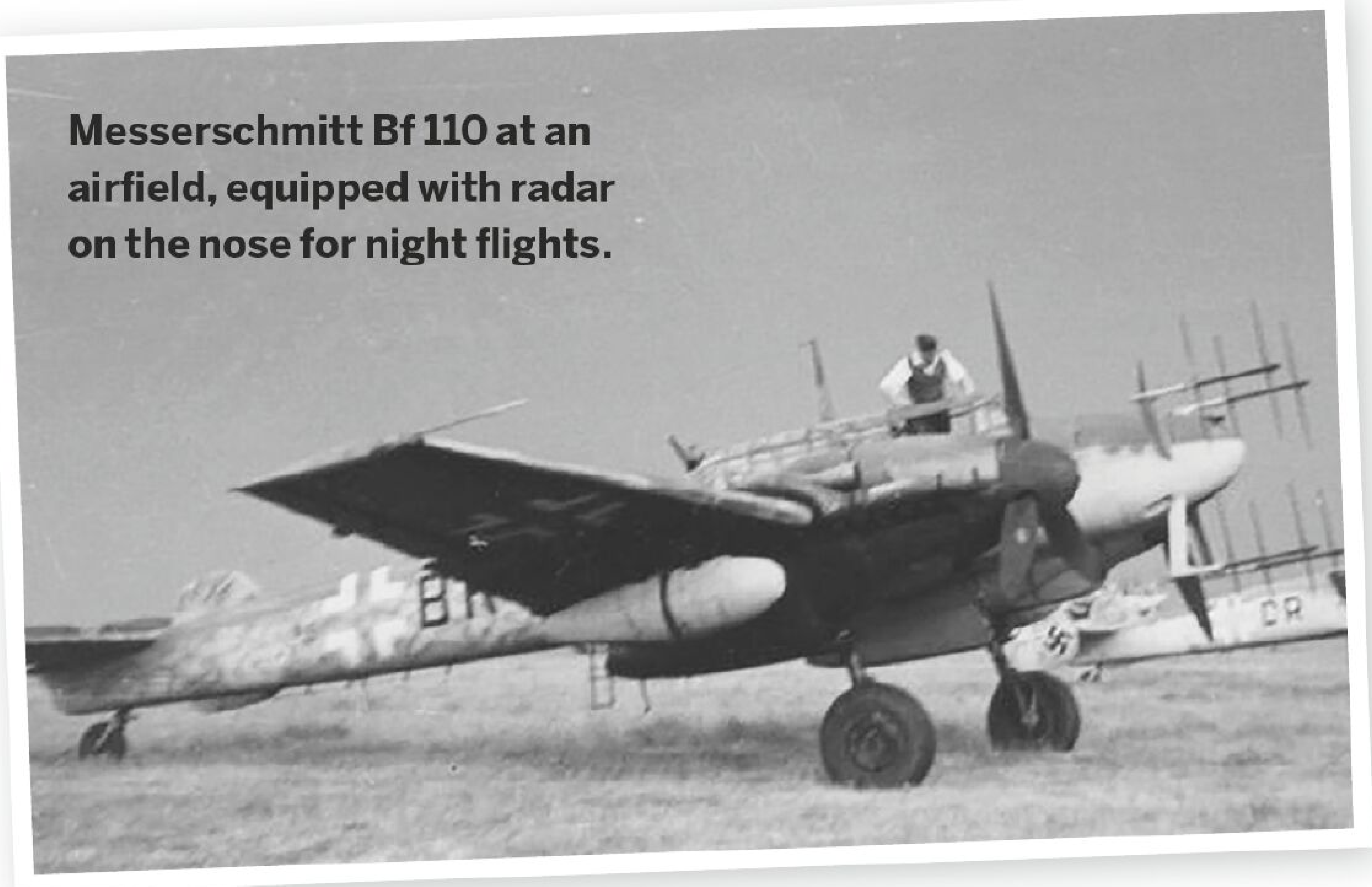
When the German government issued an amnesty for participants of the Nazis' attempted coup in 1927, Göring returned to Germany and went into politics full time. In the 1928 election, he entered the Reichstag, representing the Nazi Party. The darkest day in Göring's life came on 17th October 1931, when his beloved Carin died of a heart attack. It was something he would never recover from and it seems to have affected his character, making him even more embittered.

"GÖRING SOON PROVED TO BE TALENTED AS BOTH A FIGHTER PILOT AND COMMANDER"

Carin von Kantzow divorced to be able to live with Hermann Göring.

DESPITE BEING A member of the hitherto controversial Nazi Party, he was appointed Speaker of the Reichstag in 1932. When Hitler came to power in January 1933, Göring became Commissioner for Aviation and Minister of the Interior in the Free State of Prussia, the dominant territory in the new Weimar Republic. He also took advantage of his privileged position by having a hunting estate built, which he named Carinhall, after his late wife.

As well as being Hitler's deputy and head of Germany's economic four-year plan, Göring came to play a key role in the Nazis' persecution of Jews, Roma, socialists and other groups as the founder of the secret Gestapo police, which he transferred to Heinrich Himmler in 1934. He also maintained good relations with people in Sweden, especially among the upper class. In 1938, he was made an honorary member of the Swedish Hunters Association, and in 1939, King Gustaf V – a Nazi Germany sympathiser – awarded him the Swedish Royal Order of the ►



Messerschmitt Bf 110 at an airfield, equipped with radar on the nose for night flights.

BUNDESARCHIV BILD 101I-492-3347-025

Sword's Grand Cross. It is worth noting that this was after the introduction of the racial laws in 1935 and the *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) pogrom in 1938, and when the existence of Nazi concentration camps was common knowledge.

THE NEW AIR force, the Luftwaffe, was Göring's personal creation. As its commander, he was one of the 20th century's great innovators. He was behind most of the Luftwaffe's revolutionary new methods, organisation and equipment. He didn't personally come up with it all, but he was a very responsive manager, with a fantastic ability to see the potential of new ideas.

Without Göring, there wouldn't have been a German blitzkrieg – the tactic that gave Germany its astonishing victories against what were often far stronger opponents in 1939-41.

Thanks to his insights, the concept of blitzkrieg was developed, where Stuka bombers acted as flying artillery to clear the way for rapidly advancing tanks. Wherever they encountered serious resistance, it was shattered by swarms of bombers, guided by radio from the front line. Göring was credited with both the integration of bombers into the air force and the revolutionary co-operation between air and ground forces.

Hermann Göring also acquired the twin-engine Messerschmitt 110, the world's first truly long-range fighter aircraft, for the Luftwaffe. It became the most successful fighter plane during the first few years of the war. It was only when the United States copied the idea with its Mustang fighter jets in 1944 that the German plane was finally bested.

"WITHOUT GÖRING, THERE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN A GERMAN BLITZKRIEG"

Göring was blamed for Germany's defeat in the Battle of Britain in 1940, when the Luftwaffe tried to wipe out Britain's fighter jets, but the main reason the British succeeded was that in September 1940, the Luftwaffe began bombing London instead of continuing its successful attacks on Royal Air Force air bases.

Documents show that it was Hitler and several of his generals who pushed for the bombings to be directed at London, while Göring protested, because it would mean an end to the attacks on the bases.

Göring was also accused of making unrealistic promises that his transport aircraft could supply the besieged German army in Stalingrad during the winter of 1942–43. But Göring had actually built up a large, efficient fleet of transport aircraft. The hundreds of planes available at Stalingrad at the end of 1942 were more than enough to supply the surrounded army, but the fact is that the pilots preferred to fly in bad weather, which allowed them to hide from the enemy.

The reason why the airlift to Stalingrad failed was that the pilots refused to fly for fear of Soviet fighter jets. When Göring sent his representative to the area in January 1943, the supply flights gained momentum – but, by then, it was too late.

ALMOST THROUGHOUT WORLD War II, the Royal Air Force carried out night-time bombing raids on German cities, but this resulted in terrible losses for the British. Between 1941 and 1944, 7,200 British bombers were lost, which meant that the entire fleet of planes was effectively wiped out and replaced eight times during that period. The main reason was that Göring had built up the world's first organised force of night fighters early on in the war – and with great foresight; 70 percent of the British bomber losses were caused by those German interceptors.

While he was a brilliant and, for a long time, very popular air force commander, Göring was also a totally unscrupulous key figure in the Nazi terror system. This is particularly evident in the vicious Hunger Plan, which he developed as head of the economic four-year plan for the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. When Göring presented it to the Wehrmacht's generals on 2nd May 1941, he said: "As a result, many tens of millions of people will doubtlessly starve."

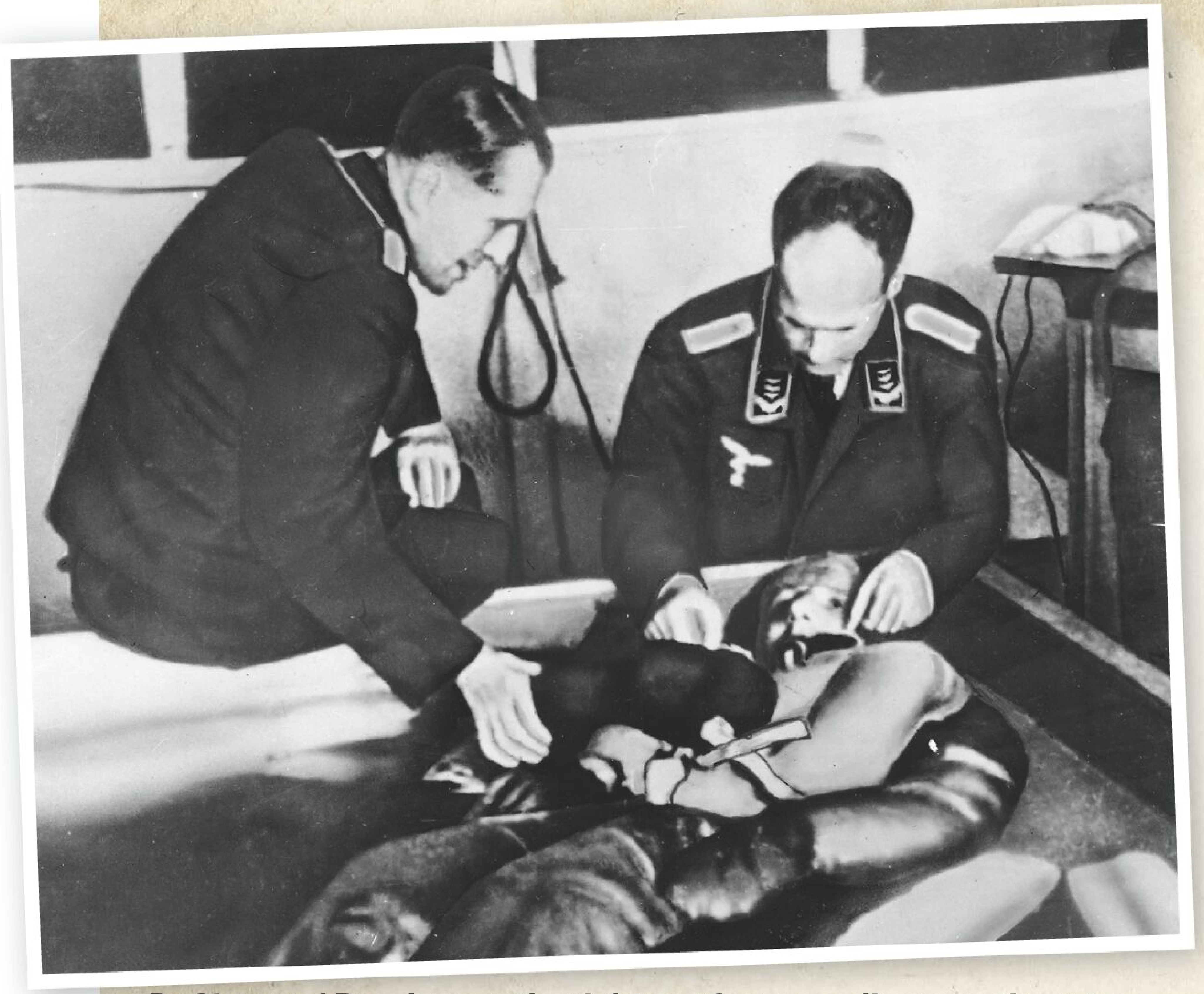
During a conference, Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, noted Göring's attitude: "The fate of the large cities, especially Leningrad, is of absolutely no importance. This war will ▶

A squadron of Junkers Ju 87 Stuka bombers going up against the Allies in North Africa, in 1941.

ULLSTEIN BILD DTL/GETTY

ULLSTEIN BILD DTL/GETTY

Göring during a visit to the Jagdgeschwader 2 (JG 2) 'Richthofen' fighter wing, stationed on the English Channel in 1940. To the right of Göring is the pilot Helmut Wick – the youngest in the Luftwaffe to be appointed wing commander. Wick was shot down in the Channel at the end of November 1940, with 56 confirmed air victories.



ULLSTEIN BILD DTL/GETTY

Dr Sigmund Rascher, on the right, performs cooling experiments for the Luftwaffe in Dachau concentration camp in 1942.

Ordered experiments on prisoners of war

★ One of many experiments carried out with Hermann Göring's knowledge sought to examine the physical effects of high altitude, low pressure, cooling and freezing on humans, using concentration camp prisoners as test subjects, all of whom died as a result.

During the trial of Luftwaffe doctor Sigmund Rascher in Nuremberg in 1946-47, former prisoner Walter Neff testified about such an experiment in which two Soviet prisoners of war managed to survive for several hours in icy water. After three hours, one Soviet said to the other, "Comrade, tell the officer that he may shoot us," but was told that no mercy could be expected from the "Fascist dog". They shook hands and said "Goodbye, comrade."

It took five hours for both prisoners of war to die from the cold.

witness the greatest starvation since the Thirty Years' War."

OF COURSE, IT'S impossible to determine exactly how many in the Soviet Union succumbed to starvation as a result of the Nazi occupation, but the number is in the millions. During the first two years, the Germans plundered enough food for 21.3 million people from the occupied parts of the federation. Nazi policy led to 20 to 40 million deaths there. According to recent German research, seven million of them died from the Nazi-caused famine alone.

In addition to these tens of millions of deaths, Göring bore personal responsibility for the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of six million Jews. As early as July 1941, he ordered Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Nazi security service, to prepare a "Final Solution to the Jewish Question". Even in his position as air force commander, Göring committed war crimes. Among other things, he was responsible for horrific human experiments on Soviet prisoners of war in the Birkenau, Dachau and Auschwitz concentration camps.

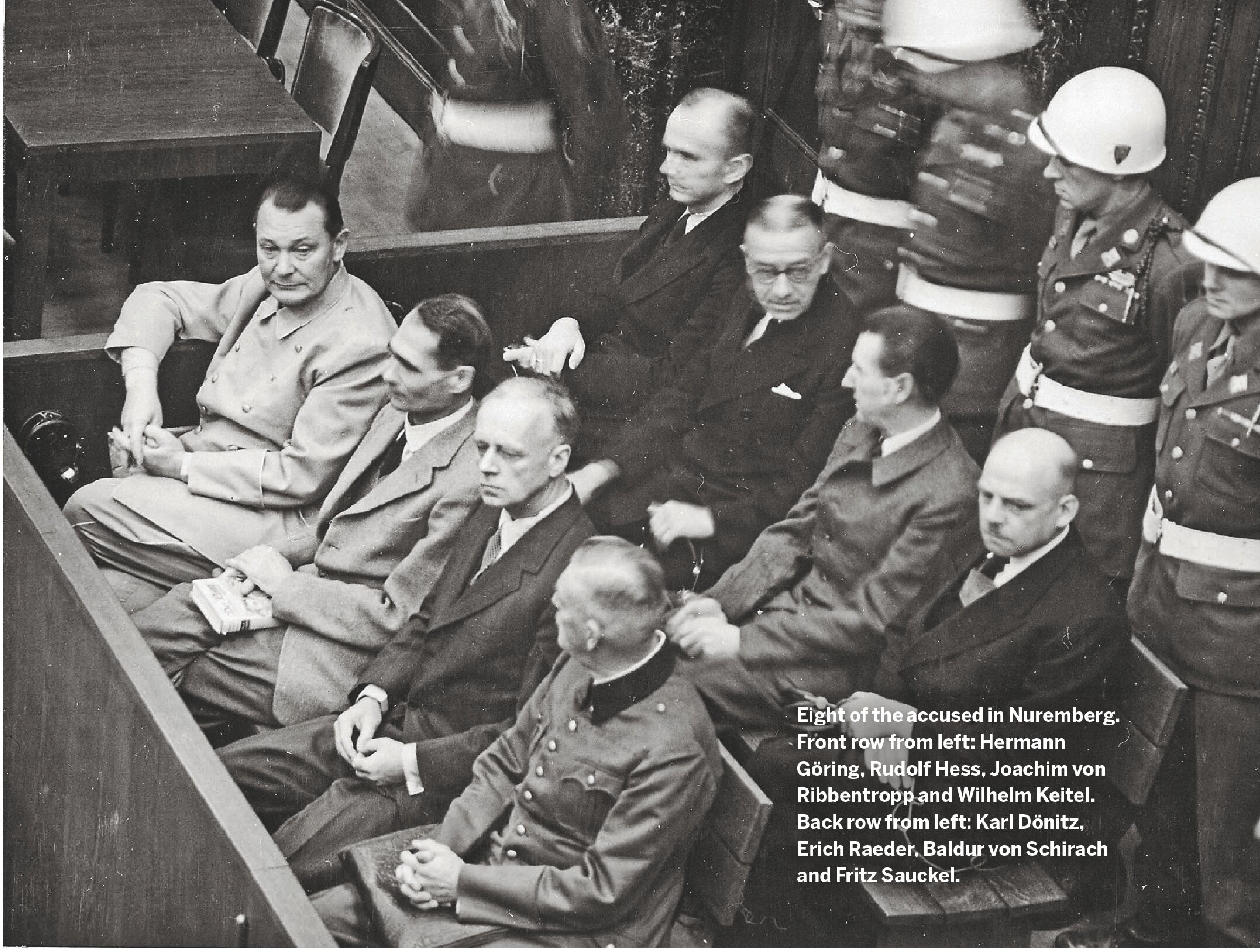
Remarkably, in the midst of all this, Göring retained a 'human' side. He had a cheerful sense of humour and encouraged the many jokes about him that spread throughout Germany. Apart from Hitler, no Nazi leader came close to the popularity that Göring enjoyed.

He was also surprisingly lenient towards subordinates who made mistakes. Although entire units could be found guilty of cowardice in the face of the enemy, Göring was reluctant to impose penalties on his pilots. He sometimes threatened to court martial them, but very rarely did so.

FROM 1943, THE Luftwaffe lost more and more of its advantage. When the US deployed its air force in Europe that year, the Allies' air superiority grew rapidly. In combat against large formations of the American B17 bomber, also known as the Flying Fortress – which was equipped with heavy machine guns – the Luftwaffe suffered heavy losses. Although the Germans still shot down more planes than they lost, it was a war of attrition that they couldn't hope to win, because the Allies simply had more planes and pilots than they did.

The inability to defend Berlin from bombing raids became Göring's downfall. His previous popularity among civilians and pilots, as well as with Hitler, plummeted. During the meeting with the mutinous pilots in January 1945, when he threatened them with execution, it was clear to Göring how isolated he was.

Characteristically, Göring didn't carry out his threats against the 'rebels'. All of the fighter pilots


Eight of the accused in Nuremberg. Front row from left: Hermann Göring, Rudolf Hess, Joachim von Ribbentropp and Wilhelm Keitel. Back row from left: Karl Dönitz, Erich Raeder, Baldur von Schirach and Fritz Sauckel.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES, US

involved, with the exception of Lützow, were allowed to return to their units and kept their posts. The only thing that happened to Lützow was that he was relocated from Germany to Italy, where he was appointed commander of fighter operations in the region.

But for Göring, it was all over. He reportedly repeated a popular German saying to one of the rebel pilots: "Enjoy the war, peace will be terrible."

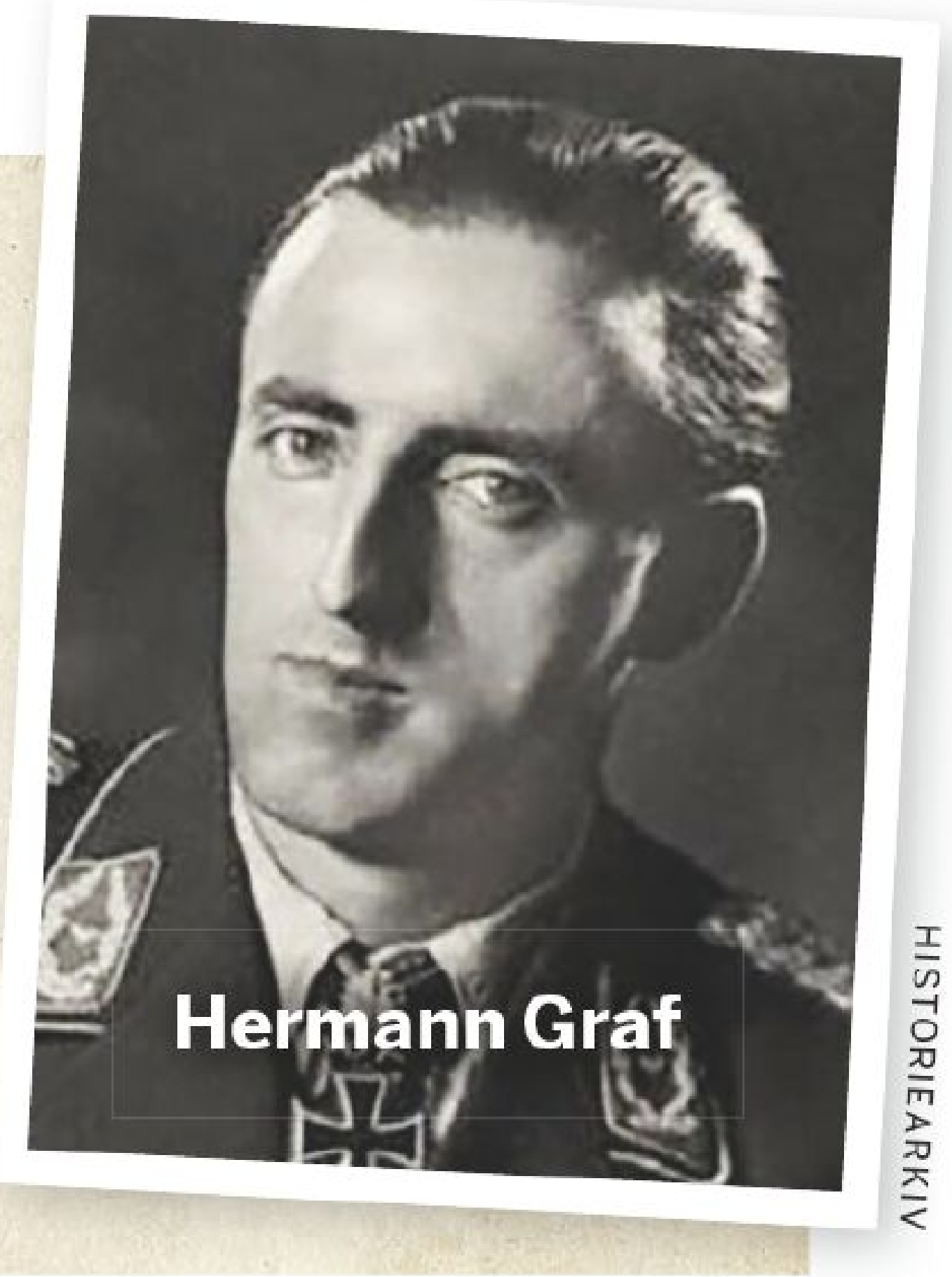
In April 1945, when Hitler was isolated in a Berlin that was surrounded by the Red Army, Göring tried to seize power, after which Hitler ordered that he be removed from all his posts and arrested. When Göring was captured by the Allies, he experienced the spotlight one last time. During the Nuremberg trials of war criminals, he demonstrated a dazzling aptitude for argument, but it couldn't save him. The court's judgment summed up Hermann Göring's malevolence as a Nazi quite well: "His guilt is unique in its enormity."

On 15 October 1946, while in prison awaiting execution by hanging, he took own his life by swallowing a cyanide capsule.

Christer Bergström is a military history writer.

The rebellious fighter pilots

★ Among the German fighter pilot commanders who took part in the mutinous meeting in January 1945 were some of the most prominent pilots of World War II. The most famous was Lieutenant Colonel Hermann Graf, who was the first to shoot down 200 enemy planes. Then there was Günther Lützow, who scored 108 air victories, while Colonel Gustav Rödel achieved 98. Colonel Eduard Neumann led the unit in which Hans-Joachim Marseille served – the ace who shot down 17 British fighter jets in one day. Colonel Hannes Trautloft, General Adolf Galland's right-hand man was also present.


Hermann Graf

HISTORIEARKIV

TERROR CAMPA

NSDAP
DEUTSCHLAND

> “THE SS WAS NAZI GERMANY’S MOST IMPORTANT TERROR ORGANISATION”

Heinrich Himmler was the head of the SS from 1929 to 1945.

CORBIS/GETTY

IGN IN EUROPE

In 1929, Heinrich Himmler was appointed as the new head of the Nazi party's security organisation, the SS. Under his leadership, the group grew into a feared elite force, which ruthlessly suppressed its enemies to realise Hitler's dream of a new Aryan Germany.

Text: **NIKLAS SENNERTEG**

N·S·D·A·P
DEUTSCHLAND
ERWACHE

BRIDGEMAN/IBL

SS soldiers parade during a party rally in Nuremberg in 1933.

SS cracked down on all opposition to the Nazi party.

The smartly dressed man with the death head badge on his uniform cap had never seen a corpse with his own eyes before. That's why he bent over the edge of the mass grave to take a closer look.

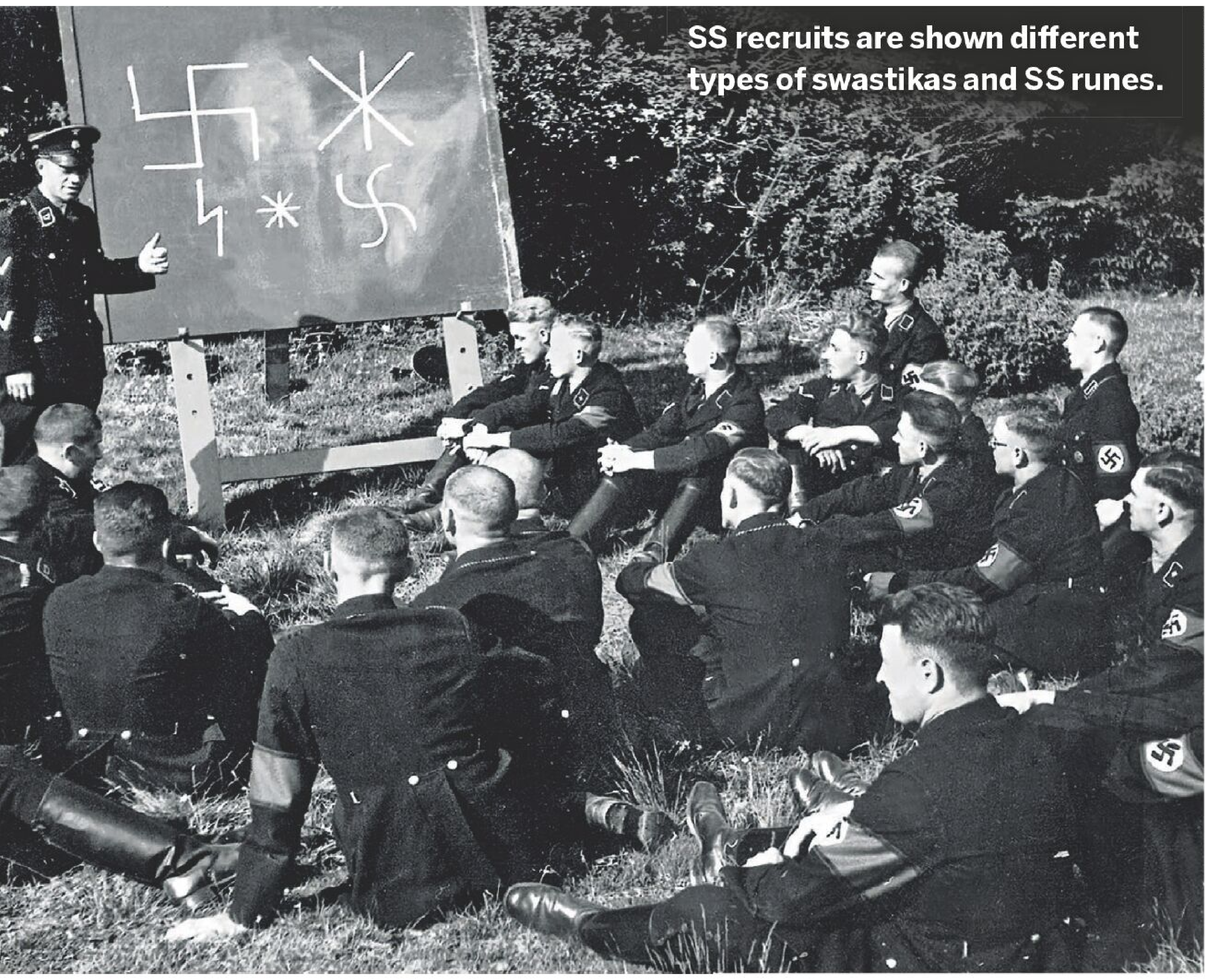
At that moment, a group of SS men who were standing by the hole let loose a volley of gunfire to finish off the Jews who were still alive in the pit. Brain matter from one of the victims spattered on to the spectator's uniform.

The man swayed and began to shake as if he were about to vomit. An adjutant quickly steadied him and led him away from the terrible scene.

It was 15th August, 1941, less than two months after the German invasion of the Soviet Union had begun. The nauseated man was none other than SS leader Reichsführer Heinrich Luitpold Himmler, who'd been instructing his underlings to use ruthless force against the enemies of the Third Reich for many years.

During a visit to the city of Minsk, which had recently been captured by the Germans, Himmler had asked to watch a mass killing. Gruppenführer Arthur Nebe, chief of Einsatzgruppe B (Belarus) – one of the paramilitary death squads sent to the Soviet Union to follow the advancing German troops – arranged an execution of 98 men and two women for his special guest. Just before the execution began, Himmler went to one of the victims, a tall young man that Himmler considered too blond to be a Jew.

Hitler's driver Julius Schreck.



SS recruits are shown different types of swastikas and SS runes.

SZ-PHOTO/IBL

"Are you a Jew?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Are both your parents Jews?"

"Yes."

"Do you have any other ancestors who were not Jews?"

"No."

"Then I can't help you," he said coolly, terminating the conversation.

The sickening scene Himmler had just witnessed was not enough for his resolve to falter even a single inch. No matter how awful it was, they had to carry out their orders. He could not let them fail to do it. In the name of the *Tausendjähriges Reich* (Thousand-Year Reich) they had to be hard and determined, Himmler stressed.

THE SS WAS NAZI GERMANY'S most important terror organisation. It oversaw the mass murder of six million Jews along with the persecution and execution of millions of others who did not conform to Nazi political, religious or racist ideals. The organisation was responsible for a wide range of activities, including espionage, the colonisation of conquered territories and conducting medical experiments on prisoners. The SS also operated businesses, industries and orphanages, developed new farming methods, and researched the origins of the German and Aryan peoples. In addition, it had a military wing, the Waffen-SS, which served the party's needs at home in Germany and fought on the front line during World War II. The SS worked outside the law and independently of other authorities; in practice it was a state within the state.

SS – an abbreviation of *Schutzstaffel*, German for "protection squad" – had its roots in Hitler's personal bodyguard. In the early 1920s, Adolf Hitler had 21 bodyguards who were tasked with protecting him during the brawls that frequently broke out at Nazi party gatherings. After a failed Nazi coup in Munich during 1923, Hitler ended up in prison and the Nazi party was banned. When Hitler was released from Landsberg Prison in the mid 1920s and resumed running the Nazi party, he instructed his driver, former actor Julius Schreck, to organise a new bodyguard. This group formed the basis of the SS.

Four years later, Hitler appointed an energetic party official named Heinrich Himmler as the new chairman of the SS. Working tirelessly, Himmler boosted its numbers from 280 members to 52,000 by the end of 1932. A year later, the SS had more than 200,000 men at its disposal.

To help him, Himmler had Reinhard Tristan Eugen Heydrich, a naval officer and notorious womaniser

This SA brigade marches through Berlin in 1932.

SZ-PHOTO/IBL

"IN THE NAME OF THE THOUSAND-YEAR REICH THEY HAD TO BE... DETERMINED"

who had been fired for "conduct unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman" for a scandal involving a lady. In 1931, Himmler tasked him with organising the Nazi party's own intelligence service, which soon became known as *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD). Over the years that followed, Heydrich became the architect of the Nazis' terror apparatus.

DESPITE ITS RAPIDLY GROWING membership, the SS was only a small force compared to Hitler's 'party army', the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), during its early years. This organisation was led by the former army captain, Ernst Julius Günther Röhm. While the SA's brown-clad, unruly brawlers broke up the meetings of other parties, caused pandemonium on the streets and mistreated political opponents, the SS was a more disciplined organisation and served as the party's own police force. Himmler wanted the SS to become an elite force, the nobility of the new Nazi empire. He expected the members to ►

Heinrich Himmler and Hermann Göring shake hands under the swastika.

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

BUNDESARCHIV

After Hitler's power grab in 1933, the SA rounded up opponents of Nazism.

embody the Nazi super-human ideal. The admission requirements were, therefore, very strict. The applicant had to be a healthy and strong male aged 25-35, over 170cm tall and possessing an Aryan appearance. In addition, every applicant had to provide two witnesses who were willing to vouch for his honesty and good character.

SS men were schooled to believe in the Nazis' racist ideology and to obey all orders blindly. The ideal SS man, according to Himmler, was a gentleman with a clean record who, on command, was boundlessly brutal against the Nazi's enemies and who would not hesitate to sacrifice his own life.

Himmler set up detailed provisions to regulate the conduct of his men. For instance, SS men who wanted to marry had to have their choice of bride approved by Himmler personally. The woman's family tree was examined to confirm whether she was of 'good race'. Finally, the SS leader would look at a photo of the man's intended and if he didn't like what he saw, there was no wedding.

HIMMLER SHROUDED THE SS in secrecy and sanctioned mysterious rites to enhance the organisation's image as an exclusive order. In the 1930s, SS men adopted their iconic black uniforms with the death head (*totenkopf*) emblem on the cap and the SS runes (*siegrune*) on the collar. The SS motto "*Meine Ehre heißt Treue*" – my honour is loyalty – emphasised which qualities were valued highest, and Hitler called Himmler "The faithful Heinrich" because of his unswerving loyalty.

When the Nazis took power in 1933, it triggered a wave of terror and persecution against the party's political opponents. Many were thrown into the SA's improvised camps. Himmler failed to land any of the newly vacant government posts. Instead, he was made a chief of police in Bavaria. There he

"HIMMLER SHROUDED THE SS IN SECRECY AND SANCTIONED MYSTERIOUS RITES TO ENHANCE THE ORGANISATION'S IMAGE AS AN EXCLUSIVE ORDER" established a political police force under Heydrich's leadership. Its goal was to pursue the party's opponents. In parallel, Göring created his own secret police – the Gestapo – in Germany's largest state, Prussia. The Gestapo was later integrated into the SS's extensive security network.

In the same year in Bavaria, Dachau opened. It was the SS's first concentration camp. Officially, Dachau existed to politically re-educate the party's 'wrong-headed' opponents so that they could be integrated into the new Nazi society. In reality, everyday life in the camp was about terror, abuse and death. Dachau was used as a model for subsequent German concentration camps.

The Nazi power takeover also heralded an internal power struggle within the party. SA chief Röhm was dissatisfied with the role given to his brown shirts. He believed that they deserved a more prominent role in the emerging Nazi state. To the consternation of the conservative generals in the Wehrmacht, Röhm insisted on becoming Minister of War and transforming the SA into a People's Army. But Röhm wasn't simply opposed by senior officers in the Wehrmacht: behind the scenes, Hitler was being fed false information by Himmler, Heydrich and Göring who claimed that Röhm was planning a coup d'état.

ON 30TH JUNE, 1934, Himmler and Göring led SS groups and police forces in an action to eliminate the SA's leadership and other inconvenient political opponents. The total number of victims of the so-called Night of the Long Knives is unknown, but it's likely that hundreds were arrested, including Röhm.

As a reward for this action, the SS finally gained the status of an independent organisation, which opened the door for Himmler's ambitions. In the years that followed, he cemented his position as the head of Hitler's security forces. In 1934, he became responsible for the Gestapo, and two years later became chief of police throughout Germany. At the same time, he appointed Heydrich to lead the Gestapo and the Kripo, the criminal police force. The pair could now throw anyone into a concentration camp for an indefinite period without trial. Himmler and Heydrich continued to build up the security network, determined to break any and all internal resistance. During World War II, the SS's sphere of influence grew as Hitler handed it responsibility for implementing key Nazi goals, such as enacting the party's Lebensraum policy in Eastern Europe. Hitler and Himmler dreamed of creating a giant German empire by using Aryan Germans to colonise a vast swathe of Eastern Europe stretching from the German border to the Ural mountains.

The Slavic people who lived there would be eliminated or driven from their lands. As part of the ►

Heinrich Himmler (1900–45)

KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES

UPBRINGING

Raised in a conservative, middle-class family in Munich. Joined the army in 1918, but was unable to get to the front before World War I was over. Studied agronomy after the war.

CAREER

Became a member of the Nazi Party in 1923. He worked as one of the party's foremost propagandists before being appointed as leader of the SS with the rank of Reichsführer-SS in 1929. In 1933, Himmler became a police chief in Bavaria, in 1934, the chief of Gestapo, in 1936, the chief of the German police force and in 1939, Commissioner for the Strengthening of German Nationhood. In 1943, Himmler became Minister of the Interior, in 1944 he was appointed head of the German reserve forces, Plenipotentiary General for Administration and commander of an army group on the Western Front. Finally, in 1945, Himmler became the commander of an army group on the Eastern Front, and responsible for organizing a Nazi militia unit (Werewolf), but it only existed on paper. That same year, Himmler committed suicide in British captivity.

Himmler at the peak of his career (1), as a 7-year-old (2), as a brigadier (3) and with his wife and child (4).

FAMILY

Married Margarethe Siegroth in 1929 and had a daughter the same year. He also adopted a son. He also had another two children through an extramarital affair with secretary Hedwig Potthast.

SZ PHOTO/IBL

The SS and Gestapo secret police built a comprehensive system of controls to eradicate all opposition to the Nazi party.

Deutsche kauft nicht bei Juden
Bilder

The Nazi party launched a boycott of Jewish shops in 1933.

invasion of the Soviet Union, Himmler and other Nazi leaders predicted that 20 to 30 million Soviet citizens would starve to death, partly because the Nazis intended to block food supplies. A select number of the 'subordinated' Slavic people would be allowed to remain as a cheap labour force.

THE WORST CRIME associated with the SS was the persecution and attempted genocide of the Jewish people, or what the Nazis liked to euphemistically term "The Final Solution".

Jewish persecution began as soon as the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933. Using threats, acts of terror and new laws, the Jews were quickly deprived of their positions, property and citizenship.

In January 1939, Heydrich was commissioned to 'solve' the Jewish question by means of forced migration, but this plan was thwarted as most countries closed their borders to Jewish refugees. Himmler sent in four paramilitary death squads, the *Einsatzgruppen*, during the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. The 3,000 men in the squads were charged with the assassination of Jews, Romas, communists and others deemed undesirable by the Nazis. During the first year of the campaign, an estimated one million people were killed in the mass murders, including those witnessed by Himmler in Minsk in August 1941.

In the autumn of that year, Hitler commissioned Himmler to proceed with the extermination of all Jews throughout Europe. In 1942, the trains began to feed death camps that had been especially fitted with gas chambers. The camps were hidden in relatively remote locations in occupied Poland. One, Auschwitz-Birkenau soon became the leading death factory, where Jews were killed en masse with the cyanide-based poison Zyklon B. The camp was so efficient that the Nazis centralised their efforts and held all gas executions there. Other camps in Eastern Europe — Treblinka, Chelmno and Sobibor — were closed one by one.

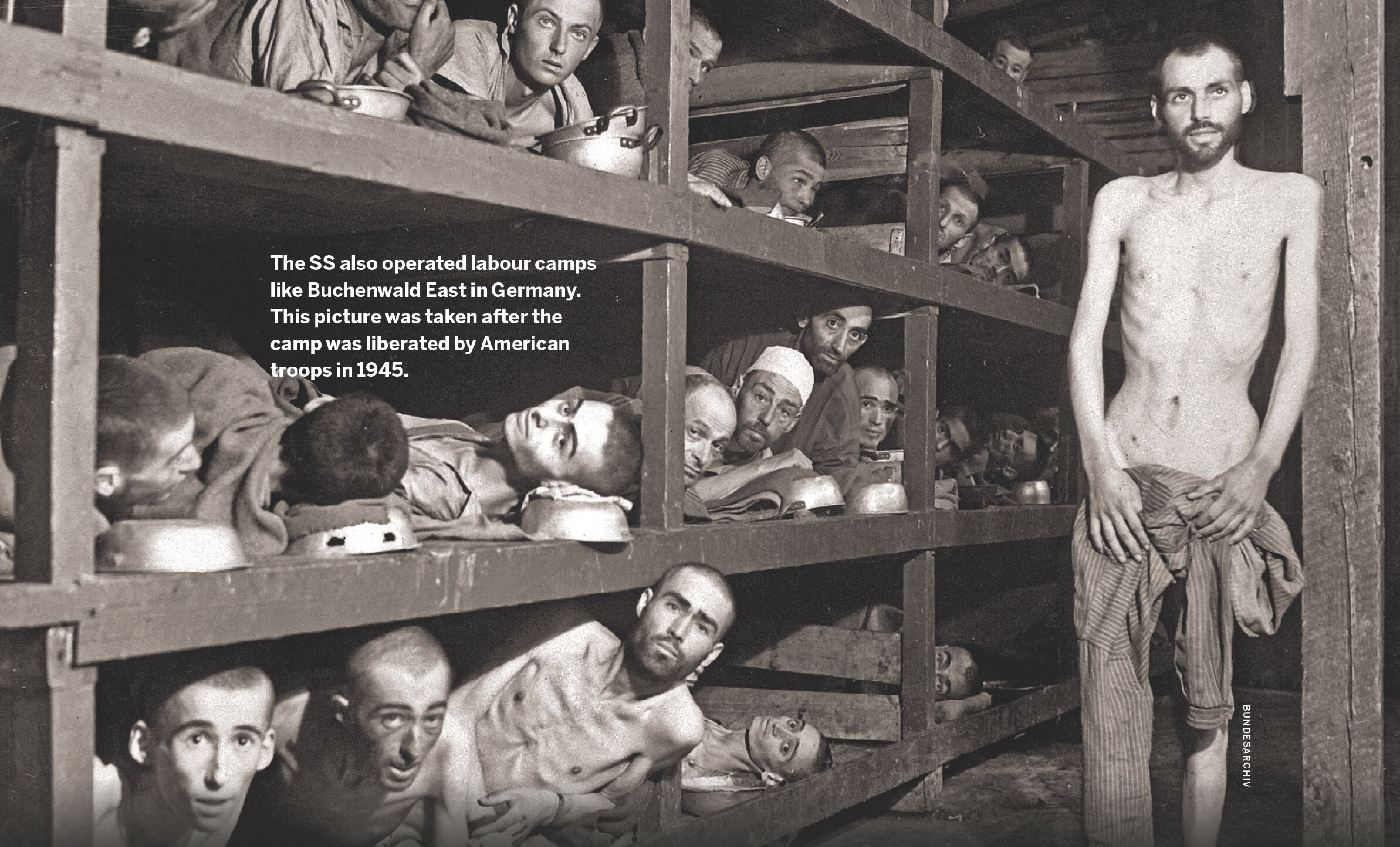
Even though the programme of annihilation was kept secret and camouflaged as 'evacuation' and 'relocation', information and rumours about what was happening – both in Germany and in the outside world – soon spread. With a desire to keep accurate records, SS bureaucrats documented the cold-blooded killings and many of these documents were discovered after the war.

By this time, German society had been mobilised for war. Many workers were summoned to serve at the front, which led to a lack of labour in the armament factories. Himmler decided that those prisoners who could work, should work and began renting out prison workforces to industrialists, like Krupp and IG Farben.

Small-scale concentration camps were established alongside the factories. For many of these sick and emaciated prisoners, working in such a camp simply meant a more protracted death than if ▶

The SS conducted research projects to prove that the Aryan breed was superior to the rest of humanity. Here a woman's head is being measured during one such test.

BUNDESARCHIV



The SS also operated labour camps like Buchenwald East in Germany. This picture was taken after the camp was liberated by American troops in 1945.

BUNDESARCHIV

The SS structure

The SS was a complicated bureaucratic organisation. It was divided into three main branches:

ALLGEMEINE-SS

Around one third of Allgemeine-SS personnel worked full time in an SS office, drew a salary and had a rank. Most people who served in the SS's other organisations or state-controlled authorities also held a rank within the Allgemeine-SS.

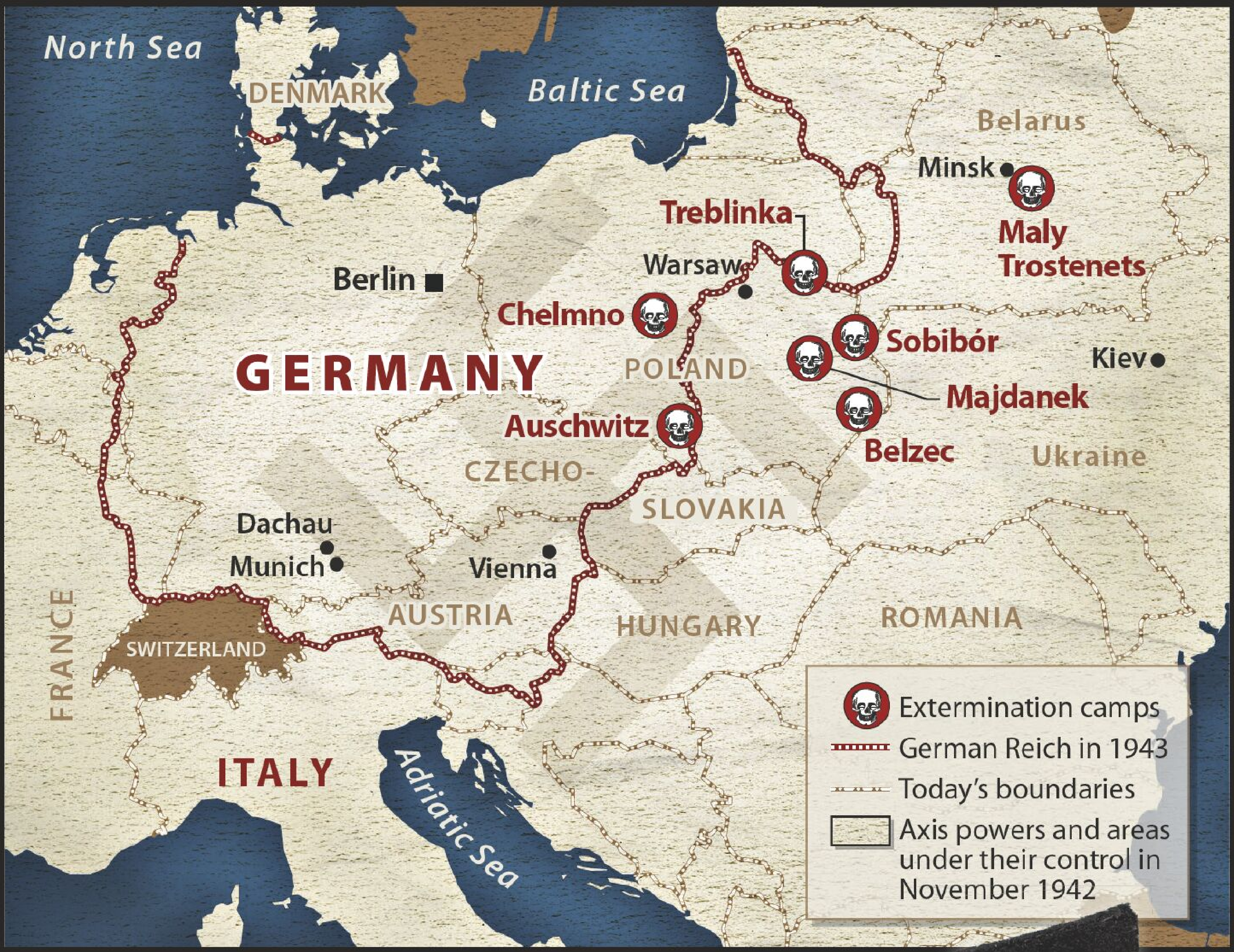
WAFFEN-SS

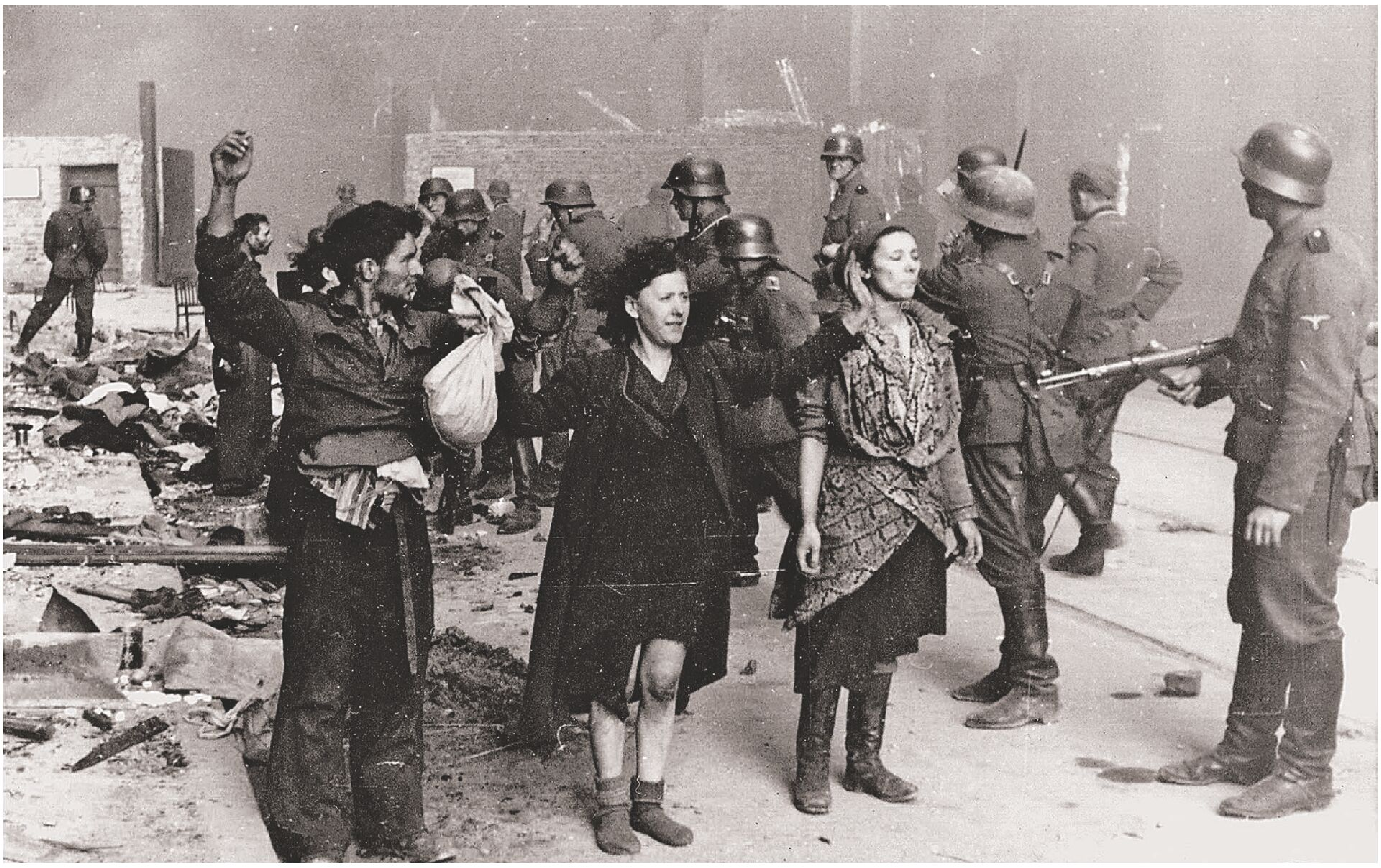
The Waffen-SS became an independent military force with its own high command in 1940. It brought together a conglomerate of SS armed paramilitary and police forces.

SS-TODENKOPFVERBANDE

This force, made up of the so-called Death Head units, consisted of concentration camp guards. From 1938, personnel were rotated between camp duty and service in the field. Able-bodied guards were stationed on the front line, while those who were no longer fit for duty were used at the camps.

SVANTE STRÖM


North Sea
DENMARK
Baltic Sea
Belarus
Minsk
Treblinka
Maly Trostenets
Warsaw
Berlin
Chelmno
GERMANY
POLAND
Sobibór
Kiev
Majdanek
Auschwitz
Belzec
Ukraine
CZECHO-SLOVAKIA
Dachau
Munich
Vienna
AUSTRIA
HUNGARY
ROMANIA
FRANCE
SWITZERLAND
ITALY
Adriatic Sea
Extermination camps
German Reich in 1943
Today's boundaries
Axis powers and areas under their control in November 1942



BUNDESARCHIV

Jews from the liquidated Warsaw ghetto were rounded up and taken to concentration camps following their uprising in 1943.

they had been delivered to a gas chamber. According to the affidavit of Dr Wilhelm Jaeger, the senior doctor for the Krupp slaves, "The Tartars and Kyrgyz suffered most; they collapsed like flies [from] bad housing, the poor quality and insufficient quantity of food, overwork and insufficient rest... At times the water supply at the camps was shut off for periods of from eight to 14 days."

The camps also became a resource for doctors who wanted to carry out medical experiments – often with fatal results. Most notorious were the terrible experiments performed on children by Joseph Mengele, camp doctor at Auschwitz.

HIMMLER'S POWER CONTINUED to grow during the war. In 1943 he was appointed Minister of the Interior, and in 1944 he became responsible for all prisoners of war and for the training of men and officers destined for the Wehrmacht.

Military setbacks started to pile up, however, and the Third Reich was close to falling. Towards the end of the war Himmler organised the *Volkssturm*, a militia force consisting of young boys and old men. It proved to be worthless because it lacked training, modern weapons and suitable commanders.

During the final months of the war, Hitler handed over command of Germany's vast armed forces to Himmler. Not surprisingly, the SS boss, who lacked military experience, proved inept as a commander.

Himmler withdrew to a sanatorium with his mistress in the final weeks of the war. Behind Hitler's back, he tried to broker a peace with the British and American governments using the Swedish diplomat Count Folke Bernadotte as a go-between. When this was revealed, Hitler dismissed "the faithful Heinrich" and branded him a traitor.

The next day, Hitler committed suicide and the war was all but over. Hunted by the Allies, Himmler went on the run in the hope of escaping justice, but he was caught at a checkpoint a few weeks later. Having admitted his real identity and knowing that only death and disgrace awaited him, Himmler bit down on a cyanide capsule that was hidden in his mouth and was dead 15 minutes later.

DURING THE NUREMBERG WAR TRIALS of 1945 and 1946, the entire SS was declared to be a criminal organisation, automatically making all its members criminals, but while many SS leaders were convicted of both war crimes and other violations by the Allied and West German courts after the war, most former SS men went on to live normal lives in West Germany, Austria or elsewhere, without ever being prosecuted. For example, of the 7,000 SS men who served at Auschwitz, fewer than 800 were ever investigated or charged by the authorities.

Niklas Sennerteg is a military historian.

HUGO JAEGER/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY

Heinrich Himmler appears on stage in his black SS uniform. This rally took place in Vienna just after Germany annexed Austria in 1938.

Himmler's top secret speech

★ Excerpt from a secret speech that Himmler gave to SS generals in the city of Posen in Poland on 4th October, 1943:

"I also want to talk to you, quite frankly, on a very grave matter. Among ourselves it should be mentioned quite frankly, and yet we will never speak of it publicly.

"I mean the clearing out of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish race. It's one of those things it is easy to talk about – 'The Jewish race is being exterminated', says one party member, 'that's quite clear, it's in our programme – elimination of the Jews, and we're doing it, exterminating them.' And then they come, 80 million worthy Germans, and each one has his decent Jew. Of course the others are vermin, but this one is an A-1 Jew. Not one of all those who talk this way has witnessed it, not one of them has been through it. Most of you must know what it means when 100 corpses are lying side by side, or 500 or 1,000. To have stuck it out and at the same time – apart from exceptions caused by human weakness – to have remained decent fellows, that is what has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and is never to be."

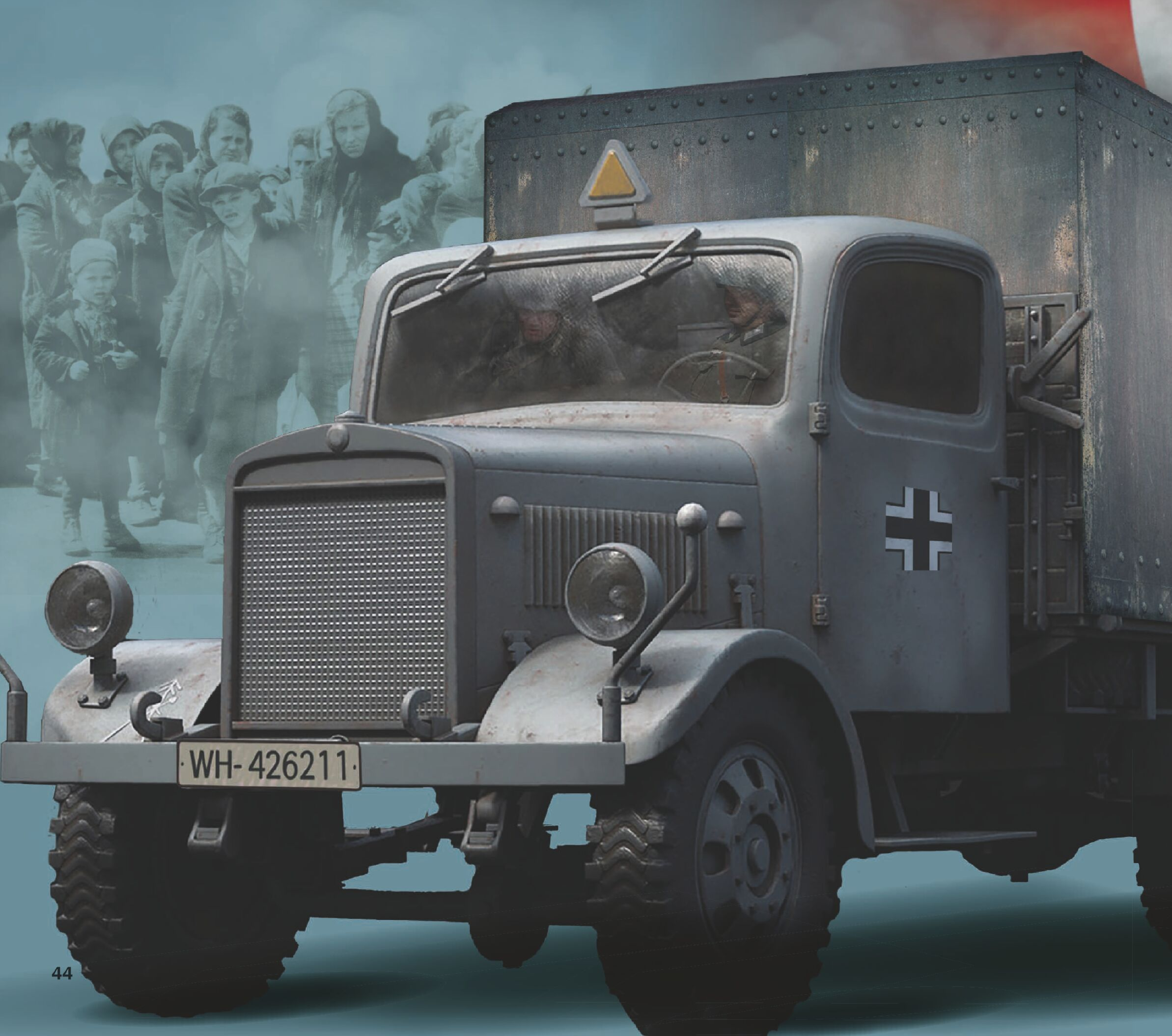
"THE JEWISH RACE IS BEING EXTERMINATED"

ARBEIT MACHT FREI

PER IDBORG

Extermination camps were scattered throughout Poland and Belarus run by Totenkopf-SS forces.

HITLER'S SECRET DEATH



VANS

WH-44221
WH909478

At the beginning of World War II, Nazi Germany developed special lorries that could gas 40–90 people in a matter of minutes. The Nazi leadership was keen to use them and sent the vans east. They were first used in Poland, then when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, Hitler's lorries followed in the army's footsteps.

GETTY IMAGES, ALAMY/SCANPIX

BY TROELS USSING

Driver Wilhelm Sackenreuter tightly gripped the steering wheel as he steered his lorry off the bumpy dirt track. He pulled up by a group of SS soldiers, who were smoking their morning cigarettes in front of the entrance to an abandoned mine, just outside the city of Stalino (present-day Donetsk in Ukraine).

Despite wearing an immaculate black SS uniform, Sackenreuter immediately stepped down from the cab and climbed beneath his long, grey lorry and began tinkering with some pipes.

The lorry resembled a removal van: there were no windows in the cargo area – everything was completely enclosed, and thick iron bars blocked the heavy rear doors.

With cigarettes dangling from the corners of their mouths, the SS troops from Einsatzgruppe C (Task Force C) looked on with indifference – they knew what was about to happen, because they'd witnessed it many times before as they travelled through the vast territories that the German armed forces had captured in the Soviet Union.

Sackenreuter got to his feet, jumped into the cab and turned the key. The engine started thrumming again. Shortly after, a gentle knock was heard from inside the cargo area, but soon the noises changed to a loud, frantic banging.

"Germans, let us out. We beg you!" yelled frightened voices from inside the van. But the back doors remained closed.

The pleas became screams of desperation and the truck started rocking on the ground as those trapped within struggled to escape. After a few minutes, the noise subsided and everything went quiet. Sackenreuter switched off the engine, walked to the back of the truck and opened the heavy doors with difficulty. He quickly stepped to one side to avoid being hit by the first corpses that fell to the ground. Using a torch, Sackenreuter illuminated the compartment, where exhaust fumes still hung thickly in the air. A jumble of men, women and children lay on top of each other on the van's bed.

"All dead," he announced and indicated that the Einsatzgruppen could start emptying the mobile gas chamber.

The massacre on that beautiful spring day in 1942 had gone according to plan. Soon the "death van", as the locals called the vehicles, would take on a fresh load.

NAZI GAS EXPERIMENTS

Carbon monoxide

Application: Used from 1940 to 1941 in the first series of gas vans.

Pros: Odourless and gave victims a relatively peaceful death because the prisoners fell unconscious before dying.

Cons: Expensive to produce and the gas cylinders were cumbersome to transport over long distances and to areas with a poor road network.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Gas trucks to exterminate the sick

Since the 1930s, Hitler had strived to purify the German race and create a physically and mentally superior people. In the Führer's opinion, those who were disabled or mentally ill stood in the way of developing a strong Germanic people, so he ordered that all "life unworthy of life" be eradicated.

From the autumn of 1939, German doctors were encouraged to commit euthanasia on patients deemed "incurable", as Hitler put it in a secret document. With overdoses of morphine and sleeping pills, doctors simply got rid of any unwanted children and adults.

The medicine required was expensive, however, and the campaign in Poland, from September to October 1939, had also made it clear that Germany would need significantly more hospitals to treat soldiers wounded in the fighting in Eastern Europe.

Thus, hospital patients in occupied Poland had to be got rid of quickly, so that wounded Germans could be treated instead. The task required a cheap, quick method of killing the sick.

Two German chemists were put to work, experimenting on rats using different types of gas. They were both officers in the SS – Hitler's corps of indoctrinated Nazis who had sworn to obey the Führer's orders without question – and the two worked around the clock to find the most effective method of execution.

The chemists, August Becker and Albert Widmann, found that carbon monoxide worked well. The deadly gas was tested on humans in January 1940 in a former prison in Brandenburg, where the Nazis forced 20 mentally ill men into a hermetically sealed room, that was slowly filled with concentrated carbon monoxide from a gas cylinder.

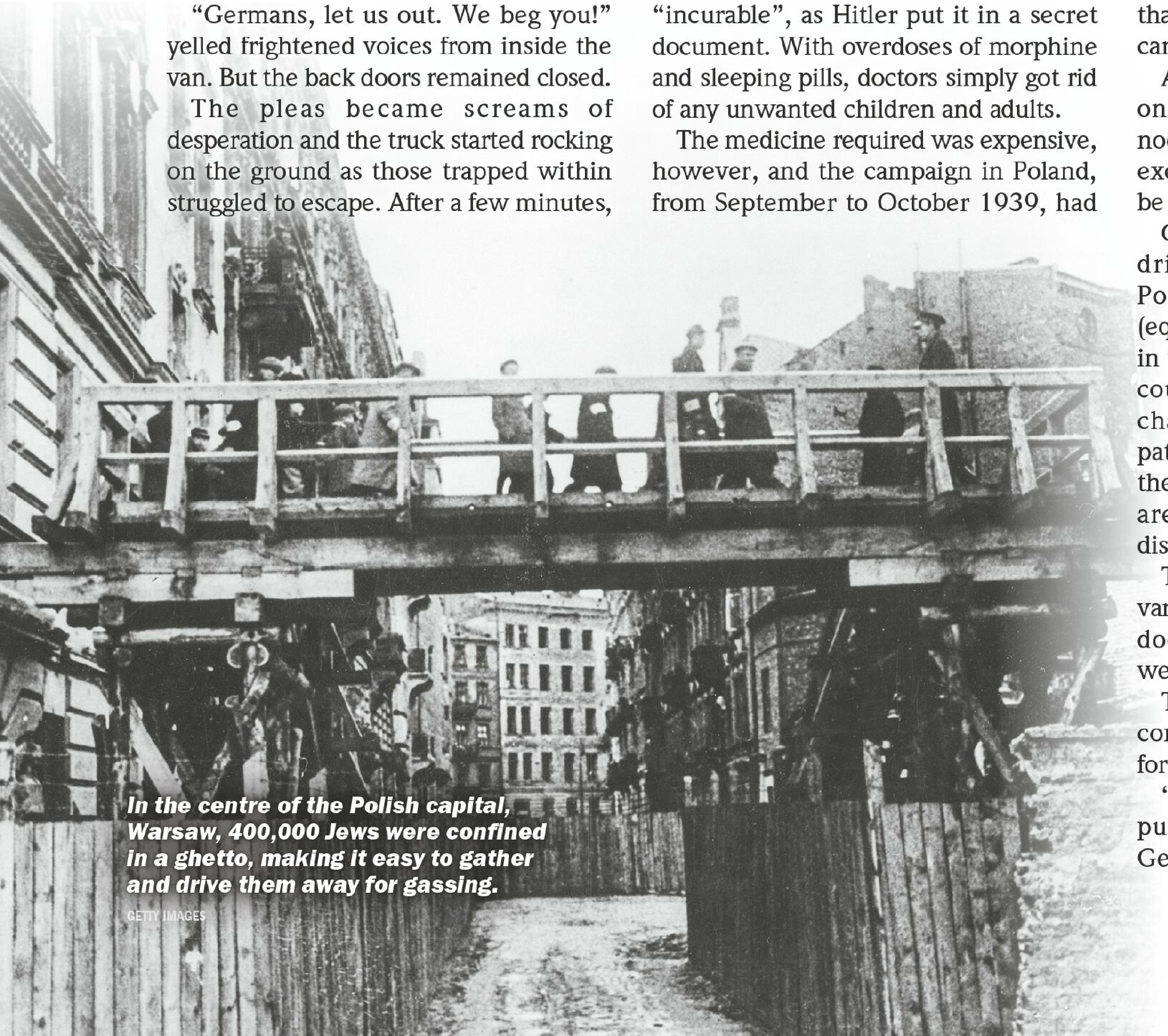
After five minutes, the men lay dead on the floor, and the Nazis present nodded appreciatively – the method of execution was approved. Now it had to be used on a large scale.

Cylinders of carbon monoxide were driven from Germany to occupied Poland, where SS-Sturmbannführer (equivalent to major) Herbert Lange was in the process of developing a truck that could be used as a mobile execution chamber. The truck was to remove patients from psychiatric hospitals, gas them, then drive the victims to remote areas where their bodies could be disposed of in secret.

The first development phase of the gas vans was so secret that only a few official documents about their construction were prepared. None survived the war.

The only descriptions of the truck come from Polish prisoners who were forced to work for Lange's special unit:

"This vehicle was converted for this purpose in the courtyard of the … Gestapo headquarters in Poznan. Four



In the centre of the Polish capital, Warsaw, 400,000 Jews were confined in a ghetto, making it easy to gather and drive them away for gassing.

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prisoners from our group, including myself and the carpenter Józef Szymanski, had to line the interior of the vehicle with plywood," said the Pole Henryk Maliczak after the war. The conversion was to ensure that the cargo area of the van was hermetically sealed, so that the gas didn't seep out through small cracks during executions.

He and other witnesses remember that Lange's gas truck bore the logo of Kaiser's Kaffee Geschäft (Kaiser's Coffee Company) on the sides. The logo was supposed to make civilians assume the vehicle belonged to an innocuous coffee distributor, disguising its true nature: a four-wheeled death machine designed to exterminate all unwanted people in occupied Poland.

Himmler splattered by brain matter

On 15th January 1940, Lange's gas van appeared in the town of Koscian in southern Poland. Two officers and SS soldiers in accompanying trucks arrived at the same time and began emptying the city's psychiatric hospital of patients.

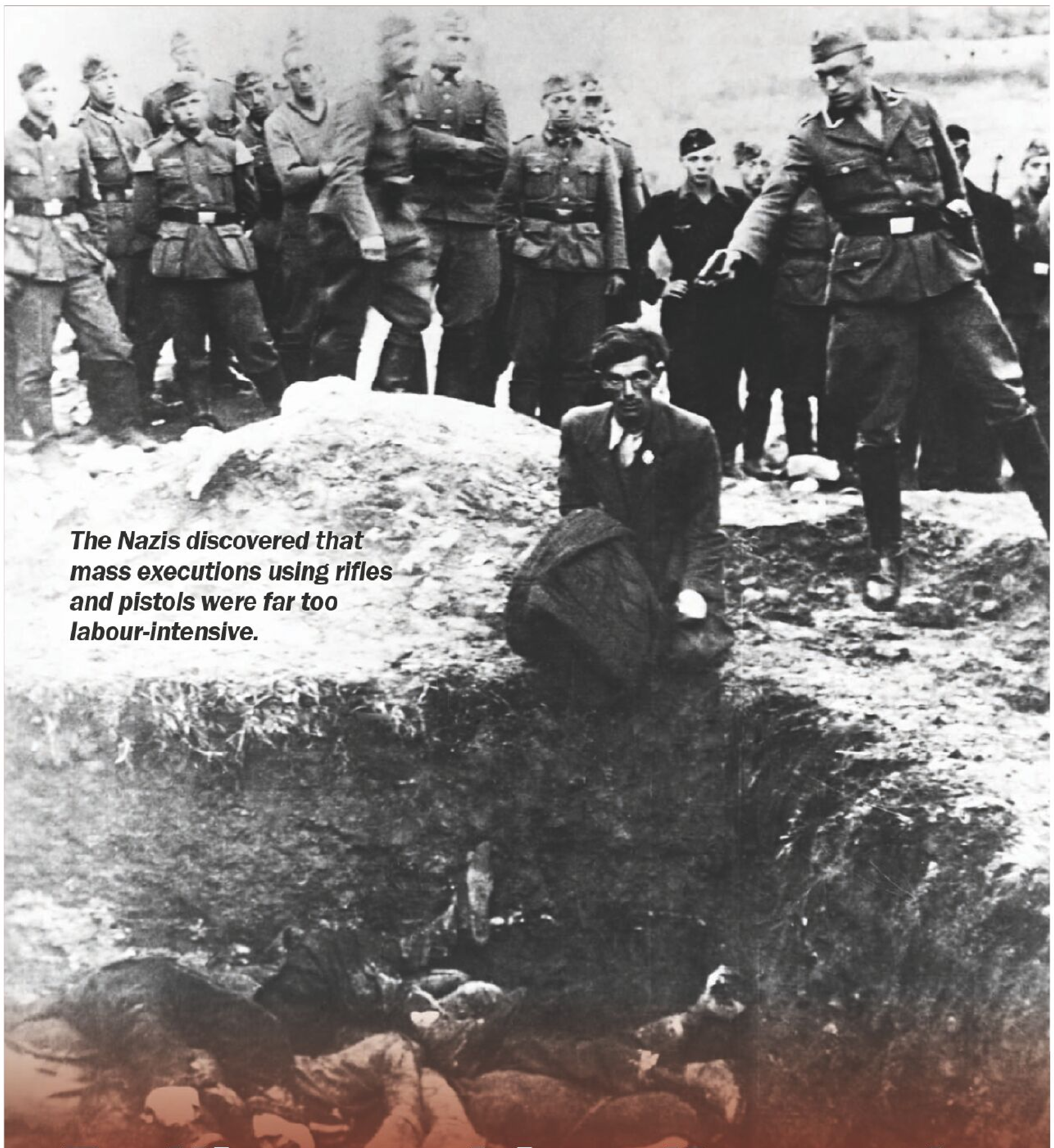
The weather was biting cold and the patients, wearing only thin shirts and trousers, shivered as they were escorted out of the institution and into the black truck bearing the coffee logo on its side.

The SS forced about 40 patients into the back before the van left the site. For a week, the truck picked up load after load, until 534 patients from the hospital had been gassed and disposed of.

Thereafter, the gas van continued its business, exterminating unwanted Poles. Lange's group was not the only one that eagerly threw itself into the task of eradicating unwanted people. Other Einsatzgruppen carried out executions with a bullet to the head, and the number of special forces deployed for the purpose grew and grew.

When Hitler declared war on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, and German tanks rolled into the Soviet republics of Belarus and Ukraine, the Einsatzgruppen were able to muster as many as 3,000 soldiers. In August, SS commander-in-chief Heinrich Himmler personally attended a mass execution in Belarus's capital, Minsk. Here, victims were shot and fell into a mass grave.

"After many volleys, I could see that Himmler was trembling. He ran his hand across his face and swayed. 'You could have spared yourself and me this,' I said to him. His face was almost green. And then he said, 'A piece of brain just splattered in my face.' He immediately ▶



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The Nazis discovered that mass executions using rifles and pistols were far too labour-intensive.

Bullies and intellectuals responsible for killings

Nazi Germany set up special task forces to kill unwanted populations in captured territories efficiently.

Mobile death squads– the Einsatzgruppen – were established in 1939. In occupied countries, they were used to track down and liquidate groups that the Nazis considered a threat.

Jews, Communists and Roma, in particular, were hunted down, while those with disabilities and mental illness were also on the death list, along with lawyers, engineers and others from the upper echelons of society, who were considered the most likely future leaders of Eastern European resistance movements.

The task forces were formed by the head of the Reichsicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), Reinhard Heydrich. The fanatical Nazi believed he needed two types of men: skilled leaders and cold killers. Heydrich recruited educated men as leaders because he wanted intelligence and ingenuity. In particular, young lawyers and members of the Gestapo, Germany's secret police, joined the Einsatzgruppen. They worked with local people in Eastern Europe to eradicate undesirables.

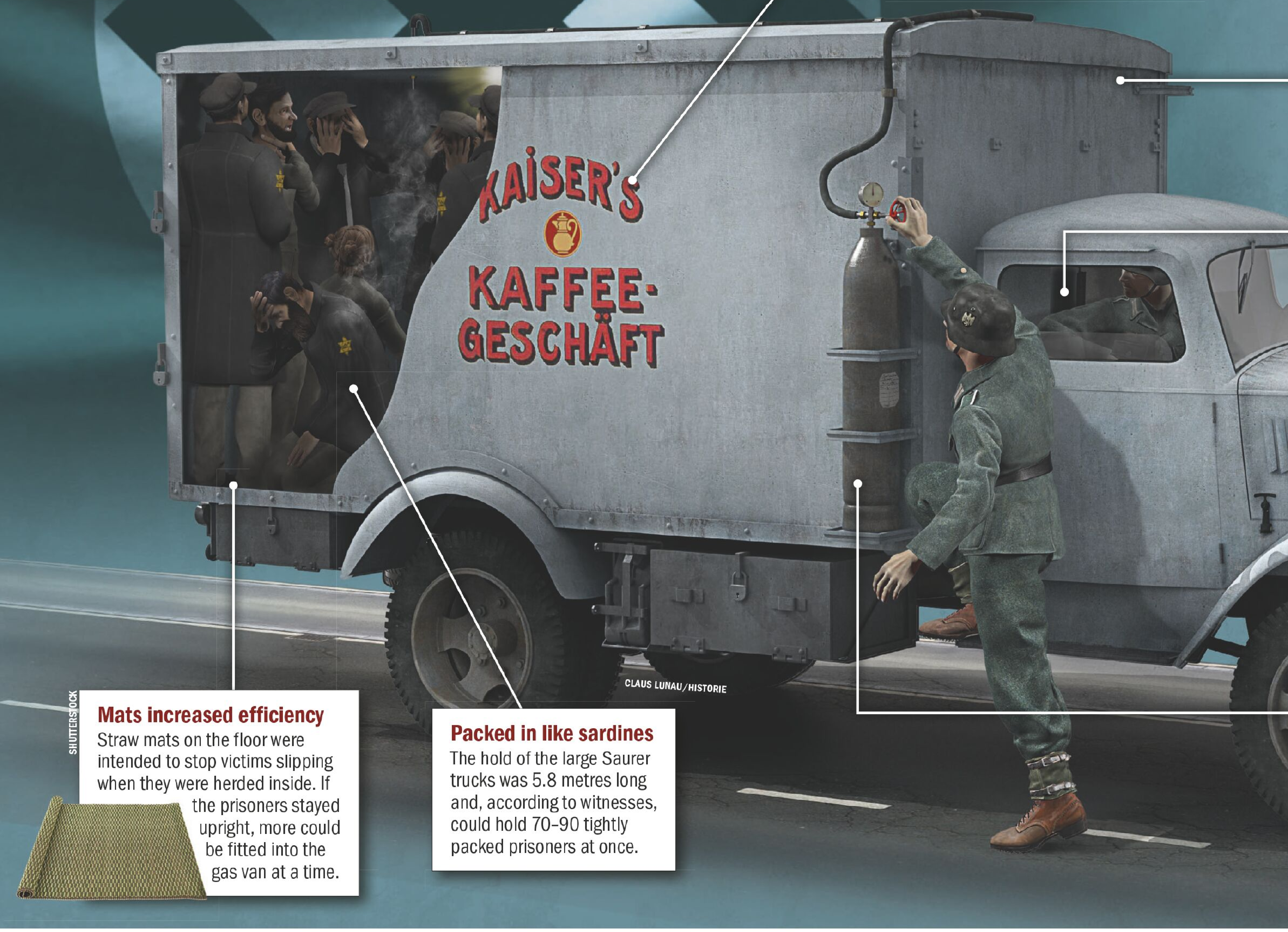
To carry out the killings, cold-bloodedness was also required, so Heydrich recruited soldiers from the SS in particular – some volunteered, to avoid punishment for misconduct.

For three weeks, the executioners were indoctrinated to hate the alleged subhumans they were to hunt down in Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

In the Soviet Union alone, the task forces killed over a million Jews and tens of thousands of partisans.

Death awaited in innocent-looking trucks

Hitler's death vans were converted lorries that looked innocuous. It was important that the prisoners didn't panic, and the tight schedule meant that the gassing was over in quarter of an hour.



CLAUS LUNAU/HISTORIE

SHUTTERSTOCK

Coffee logo tricked prisoners
The Nazis' first gas truck had a logo from the coffee manufacturer Kaiser's Kaffee on the sides. It ensured the death van didn't cause a stir on the streets.

Mats increased efficiency
Straw mats on the floor were intended to stop victims slipping when they were herded inside. If the prisoners stayed upright, more could be fitted into the gas van at a time.

Packed in like sardines
The hold of the large Saurer trucks was 5.8 metres long and, according to witnesses, could hold 70-90 tightly packed prisoners at once.

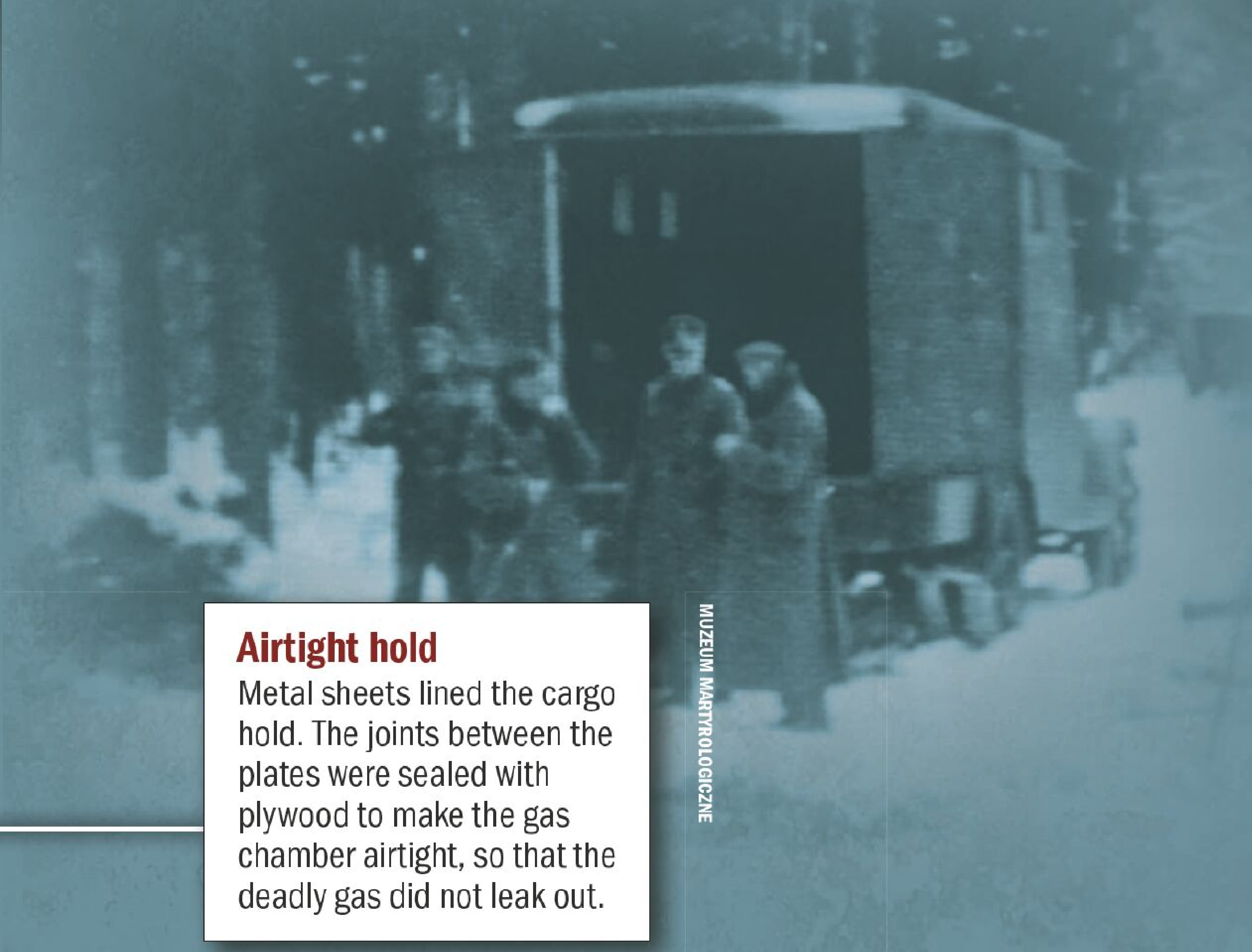
threw up," an SS officer who was present later recalled.

Himmler was shaken and decided that a more "humane method" was needed, so his men could avoid the psychological "hardship" that shooting people risked inflicting on his special forces. After several meetings with SS-Sturmbannführer Lange, Himmler and the head of the Reichsicherheitshauptamt (Reich Main Security Office), or RSHA, Reinhard Heydrich, agreed upon a supposedly gentler method: gassing, using Lange's special vehicles. But the poor condition of the roads in the Soviet Union made regular deliveries of carbon monoxide cylinders impossible. Instead, chemical engineer Widmann suggested that the trucks' own exhaust gas be used.

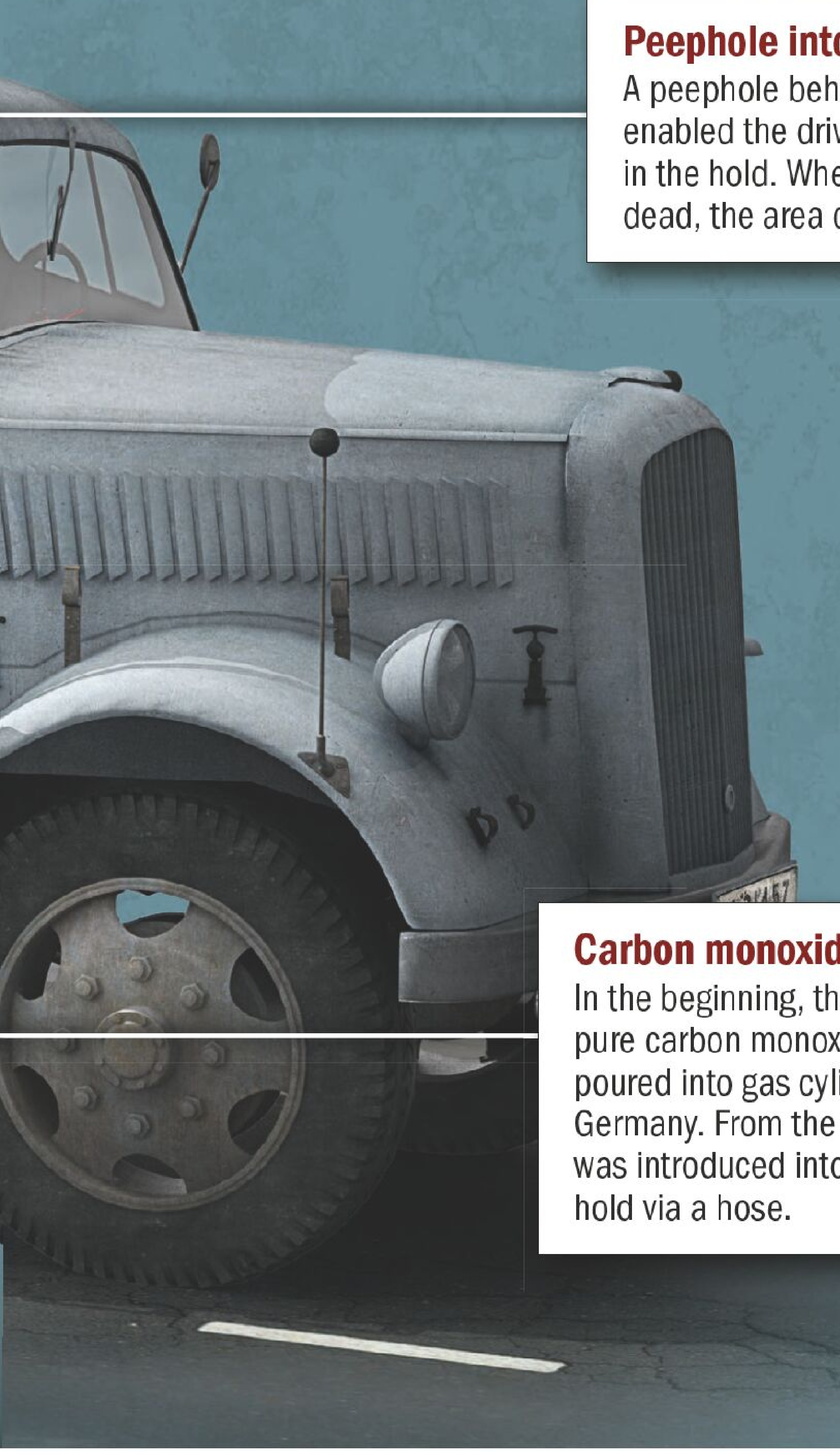
When a test gassing of 40 Soviet POWs in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp went according to plan, eight more trucks were converted to the new type of gas van. Some were small Opel Blitz trucks, with room for a maximum of 40 people in the back, while larger Saurer trucks could gas over 60 at once. Four vehicles were sent to Einsatzgruppen in the Soviet Union, three drove to the Chełmno concentration camp in Poland, and the last went to Riga in Latvia.

Ukrainians refused to be deceived

After a few months, it was time to evaluate the vans' performance, and the SS sent the chemist August Becker – one



MUZEUM MARTYROLOGICZNE



Airtight hold
Metal sheets lined the cargo hold. The joints between the plates were sealed with plywood to make the gas chamber airtight, so that the deadly gas did not leak out.

Peephole into cargo area
A peephole behind the driver's seat enabled the driver to see prisoners in the hold. When everyone was dead, the area could be emptied.

Carbon monoxide transport
In the beginning, the death vans used pure carbon monoxide, produced and poured into gas cylinders at home in Germany. From the cylinders, the gas was introduced into the airtight cargo hold via a hose.

CARBON MONOXIDE KILLED IN 15 MINUTES

1 Victims inhaled the gas

Presumably, the victims tried to hold their breath while carbon monoxide leaked into the hold. After a few minutes, they would have gasped for air and their lungs would fill with the deadly gas.

2 Carbon monoxide entered the blood

From the lungs, the carbon monoxide moved into the blood and bound itself to red blood cells, which transport oxygen around the body.

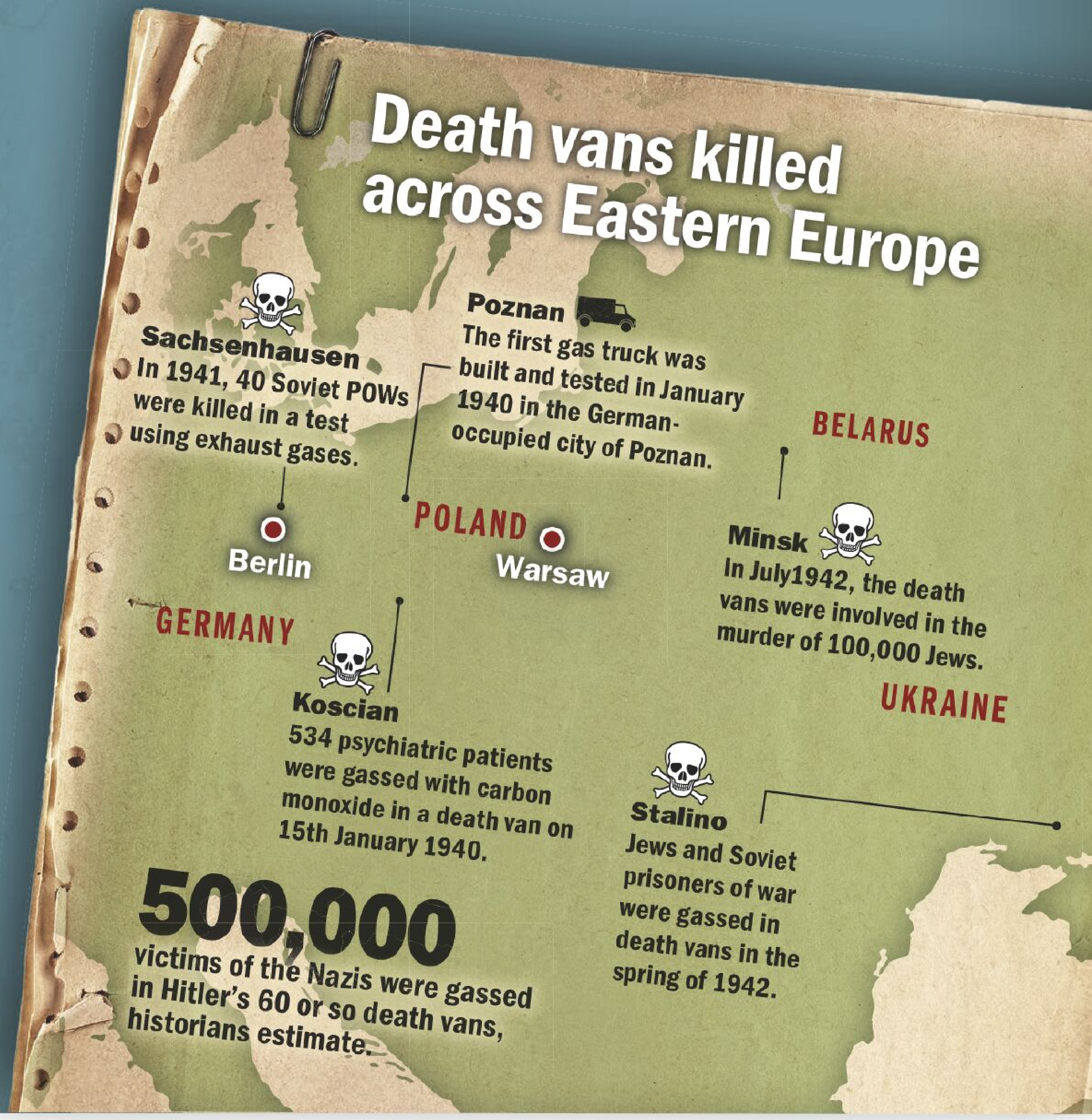
3 Nausea and dizziness set in

When the carbon monoxide bound itself to red blood cells, they could no longer transport enough oxygen around the body, and oxygen deficiency occurred. The victims became dizzy, with headaches and nausea. Then after a few minutes, they fainted.

4 Victims lay lifeless on floor

The lack of oxygen meant that the brain, heart and other vital organs stopped functioning. Around 15 minutes after the gassing began, the victims collapsed down dead.

Death vans killed across Eastern Europe


Poznan
The first gas truck was built and tested in January 1940 in the German-occupied city of Poznan.
Sachsenhausen
In 1941, 40 Soviet POWs were killed in a test using exhaust gases.
BELARUS
POLAND
Berlin
Warsaw
Minsk
In July1942, the death vans were involved in the murder of 100,000 Jews.
GERMANY
UKRAINE
Koscian
534 psychiatric patients were gassed with carbon monoxide in a death van on 15th January 1940.
Stalino
Jews and Soviet prisoners of war were gassed in death vans in the spring of 1942.
500,000
victims of the Nazis were gassed in Hitler's 60 or so death vans, historians estimate.

of the originators of the gassing method – to the Soviet Union to see the mobile execution chambers in action. He followed several massacres in Ukraine with interest – from the collection of prisoners to the execution, which took place "10-15 kilometres from the highways", according to Becker.

The Ukrainian side roads were often clogged by rain and snow, which made them difficult for the large Saurer trucks to negotiate. However, Becker believed that transporting the prisoners away from the city was necessary in order to conceal the massacres, but he soon learned that the Ukrainians were keeping an eye on the gas trucks. So, in the spring, he decided that the trucks should be made to look less suspicious:

"I ordered the vans of group D to be camouflaged as house-trailers by putting one set of window shutters on each side of the small van and two on each side of the larger vans, such as one often sees on farm-houses in the country," Becker wrote in May 1942, in a letter to Walter Rauff, head of the RSHA's technical department in Berlin.

Becker, however, soon realised that even this ruse could not deflect the Ukrainians' suspicion when the gas trucks travelled between towns and nearby forests or mines.

"The vans became so well known, that not only the authorities, but also the civilian population alluded to it as the ▶

NAZI GAS EXPERIMENTS

SHUTTERSTOCK

Exhaust fumes

Application: Used from 1941 to 1943 by the Germans' second series of gas vans. A hose was mounted on the truck's exhaust pipe and routed into the hold.
Pros: The exhaust gas was readily available as the German special units drove around in trucks.
Cons: The smell caused the victims to panic, which could damage the truck.

'death van', as soon as one of these vehicles appeared. In my opinion even with camouflage the van cannot be kept secret for any length of time," he stated.

Exhaust gas caused problems

The gassing of prisoners also gave the chemist cause for concern. Becker wanted the prisoners to have a peaceful death, because it caused fewer problems and sped things up, so the truck could collect and kill an extra load of victims each day. He noted that many of the truck drivers were too eager when they sent gas from the cab into the cargo area. To get the killings over as quickly as possible, the driver stepped on the accelerator too hard, so the victims were suffocated by diesel fumes instead of dying from carbon monoxide poisoning.

So in 1942, when Becker visited the Einsatzgruppen, he instructed the drivers to be patient, so the victims fell "asleep peacefully", as he described it.

Becker also noticed another frequent mistake that the troops made – namely standing too close to the trucks when the gassing was in progress.

"I ordered that during the gassing all the men were to be kept as far away from the vans as possible, so they should not suffer damage to their health by any escaping gases," read the letter to Rauff, in which Becker also pointed out that several officers left their own men in charge of emptying the truck after the gassing, which the chemist feared could lead to "immense psychological injuries and damages to their health … if not immediately, at least later on".

On Rauff's orders, most Einsatzgruppen began using other prisoners or forced labourers to drag corpses out of the trucks and dispose of them.

Gas trucks got their own camp

While the Einsatzgruppen and their gas trucks struggled on the muddy roads to reach every corner of the vast territory that the Germans had captured from the Soviet Union, Herbert Lange made other plans in Poland. Here, he had only ▶

Deutſc
Wehrt
Kauft nicht

The Nazi persecution of Jews began with calls for an economic boycott of Jewish shops and ended with mass extermination.

GETTY IMAGES

che!
t Euch
t bei Juden!

DEATH VANS MADE MORE EFFICIENT

The gas trucks were continuously improved to enable them to kill more people in less time. On 5th June 1942, foreman Willi Just from the workshop that converted the trucks sent his recommendations to Walter Rauff, who was responsible for the production of the gas vans:

Reduce length of truck

"The normal capacity of the vans is nine to ten [people] per square metre. The capacity of the larger special Saurer vans is not so great [because] of off-road manoeuvrability on all terrains ... It would appear that a reduction in the cargo area is necessary ... by about one metre. The problem cannot be solved by merely reducing the number of subjects treated, as ... a longer running time is required, as the empty space also needs to be filled with [carbon monoxide]."

Protect the bulb

"The grille should cover the lamps high enough up to make it impossible to break the bulb. It seems these lamps are hardly ever turned on, so the users have suggested that they can be done away with. Experience shows, however, that when the back door is closed and it gets dark inside, the load pushes hard against the door. The reason for this is that when it becomes dark inside the load rushes toward what little light is left."

Nozzle must point downwards

"The pipe that connects the exhaust to the van tends to rust, because it is eaten away from the inside by liquids that flow into it. To avoid this, the nozzle should be so arranged as to point downward. The liquids will thus be prevented from flowing into the pipe."

Faster cleaning

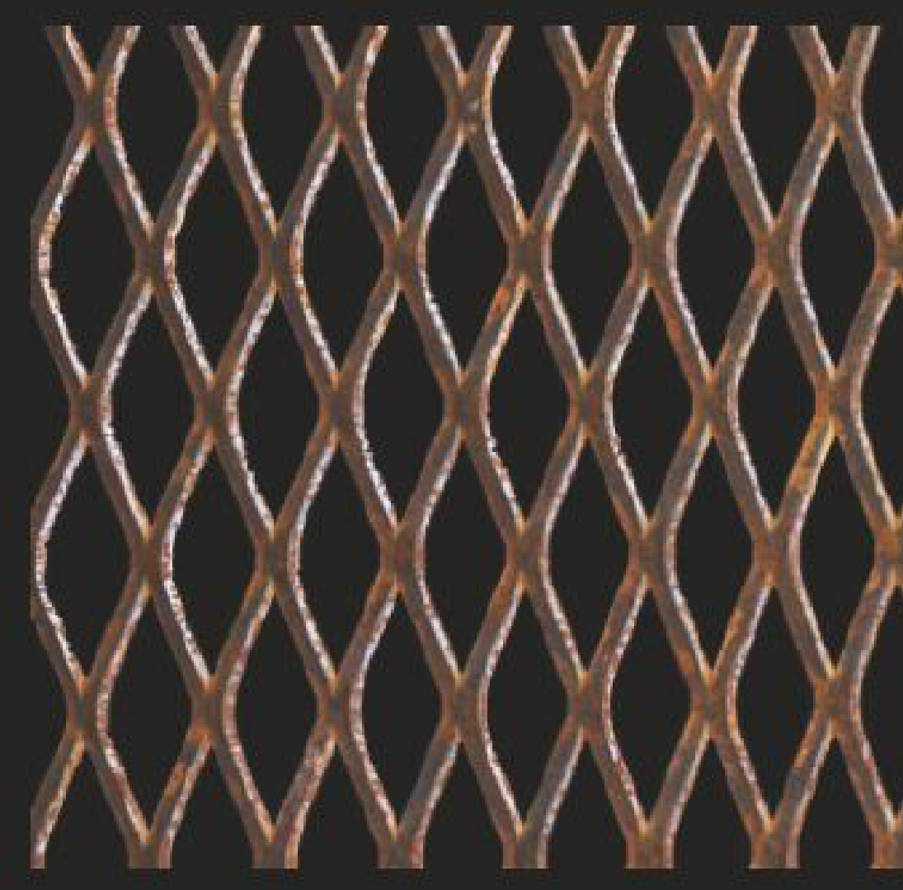
"To facilitate the cleaning of the vehicle, an opening will be made in the floor to allow for drainage ... The floor of the vehicle can be tipped slightly."

Peephole to go

"The observation windows [behind the driver's seat] ... could be eliminated, as they are hardly ever used. Considerable time will be saved in the production of the new vans."

Grid on floor speeds up process

"To facilitate the rapid unloading of the vehicles, a removable grid is to be placed on the floor. It will slide on rollers on a U-shaped rail. It will be removed and put in position by means of a small winch placed under the vehicle. The firm charged with the alterations has stated that it is not able to continue for the moment, due to a lack of staff and materials. Another firm will have to be found."



NAZI GAS EXPERIMENTS

Zyklon B

GIFTGAS!
ZYKLON

Application: Primarily used from 1943 to 1945 in Nazi death camps, where the gas was piped into large chambers via holes in the ceiling.

Pros: The gas paralysed the victims' nervous system quickly, so they suffocated after a few minutes.

Cons: The poisonous gas could be stored for a maximum of three months, after which it lost its effect.

3REICH-COLLECTOR.COM

three vans at his disposal, so instead of wasting time driving to prisoners to kill them, the prisoners would come to him.

In a deserted forest area three kilometres outside the town of Chełmno, Lange set up the Germans' first death camp. Unlike Nazi concentration camps, where undesirables toiled and slaved, no one had to work for their food in Lange's camp. At Chełmno, prisoners came only to die. The first victims were gassed in the camp in December 1941, using Lange's preferred system of bottled carbon monoxide, but in 1942, the executioner switched to the new method, where exhaust was sent directly into the rear of a van.

In Chełmno, the Einsatzgruppen sent victims through a long passage, with a tall fence on both sides. The passage got narrower and narrower, and ended with prisoners walking up a ramp and entering the hold of a waiting gas truck.

The door was closed, and the exhaust pipe connected to the hold before the truck left the camp with live prisoners on board – to save time, the victims were gassed en route to a mass grave in the forest. However, when a truck crashed and Poles from nearby villages heard screaming, the process changed.

When SS-Hauptscharführer (equivalent to master sergeant) Gustav Laabs was transferred to Chełmno to be a gas truck driver, the executions were taking place in the camp. He was uneasy about his task when he arrived in spring 1942.

SS-Hauptsturmführer (equivalent to captain) Hans Bothmann had just taken over the leadership of Chełmno from Lange, and he immediately put the new driver to work. Laabs had no idea what was going to happen when he backed his truck up to the small opening at the end of the ramp. Soon others opened the back doors, got "under the van and [did] something there", as Laabs described it during his trial 20 years later.

Soon after, the driver heard screaming, and the truck began to rock as 70 or so people were squeezed into the back.

"When the van was full, the doors were closed and locked … Bothmann … ordered me to start the motor and let it run for 20 minutes. I started the motor, and after about one minute I heard terrible moaning and screaming coming from inside the van. I was overcome by fear and jumped out of the cab … Bothmann yelled at me and ordered me to get back inside. I sat and waited. I couldn't do anything, because I was afraid of Bothmann. Slowly the moans and cries faded away," Laabs explained from the witness stand.

In time, however, he got used to his job as executioner. Soon, he fitted the hose that carried the gas into the truck's hold himself, and shot any prisoners who miraculously survived the gassing.

Horrific scenes met workers

After the gassing, the loaded truck drove out of the camp gate and to a nearby forest. Here, other Polish prisoners stood ready to empty the hold of corpses and throw them into open mass graves – a difficult and gruesome task:

"The corpses that fell out of the truck were clinging to one another, as if in convulsive grasps, in contorted positions, sometimes with mangled faces. I saw one with the teeth sunk into another's jaw, while others had their noses or fingers bitten off," explained one of the few survivors from these work teams.

"The Gestapo officers ordered us to separate the corpses, and if this did not work, then to chop them up, cutting off hands, legs and other parts," he recalled.

Another worker recalled that gassing didn't always work and some children were still alive when they arrived, as the gas hadn't diffused down to their level. In those cases, the Nazis smashed the children's skulls on the spot.

3,000 murdered every day

Chełmno's gas vans drove into the woods five to ten times a day, and camp commander Bothmann described summer 1942 as particularly successful, with 3,000 daily murders. With so many executions, the mass graves began to pose a problem. The inhabitants of the nearest villages complained of a terrible stench, so it was decided to dig up the thousands of corpses and burn them.

The Einsatzgruppen built incinerators in the forest to cremate the bodies. A Polish forester, who was shown around by Bothmann, also witnessed another of the Nazis' macabre tools: "The hollow, cylindrical bones which were not burnt were taken out and pulverised in a bone mill driven by a motor, which was located in an especially built wooden barrack. I don't know where they took this bone flour. There must have been great quantities," explained the forester, who also saw Bothmann terrorising a Jewish forced labourer. The commander asked him to fetch a handful of broken bones from the bone grinder, after which the Nazi snorted at the Jew: "These are members of your race."

Gas chambers shot up

Chełmno's methods of extermination inspired the Nazi leadership, so when Heydrich proposed the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" in 1942, it led to the creation of five more death camps in Poland and one in Belarus.

The idea of using gas as a method of execution had now been taken seriously by the Nazis' top people, but the limited capacity of the trucks was not sufficient for Heydrich. Instead, gas chambers with room for several hundred prisoners were to be built. Bodies were to be cremated on the spot to save time removing them.

Such large gas chambers would take far too long to fill with exhaust gas from trucks, so the Germans started using the poisonous gas Zyklon B. Large diesel engines were mounted on the chambers, too, so cheap exhaust could continue to contribute to the extermination of Jews, Roma and others whom the Nazis considered inferior races.

By summer 1942, however, Heydrich had not abandoned the vans. One of the few surviving notes from the RSHA's technical department shows that an order for "30 special superstructures for chassis delivered was given to Gaubschat company" and "20 vehicles are already finished and have been delivered".

Including the prototype and the eight trucks delivered in 1940, the Nazis had about 60 vans by the end of 1942. But that number soon dropped dramatically.

With the German defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943, the fortunes of war , helped on by the Red Army, turned against the Nazis, so the Einsatzgruppen hastily had to destroy evidence of their misdeeds. As Soviet forces advanced on Germany, the Einsatzgruppen, it's assumed, blew up the death vans – none of them survived the end of the war. ■

Fate of gas truck proponents

Numerous Nazis were involved in the gas-van mass killings, but they destroyed the evidence or fled when Hitler's Germany fell, which allowed some to escape punishment after the war.

Heydrich
Himmler

BOSSES

HEINRICH HIMMLER AND REINHARD HEYDRICH

Titles: Commander of the SS and head of the *Reichsicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA), respectively.

Roles: As the Nazi commanders responsible for the systematic massacre of Jews and the killing of Communists and Roma, the two orchestrated the use of gas trucks in Eastern Europe.

Legal consequences: Didn't appear in court. Himmler committed suicide in May 1945, while Heydrich was killed by SOE agents in summer 1942.

CHEMIST

ALBERT WIDMANN

Title: SS-*Untersturmführer* (equivalent to second lieutenant) and chemist in the RSHA's forensic department.

Role: During the war was involved in the testing of various gases for the death vans. He was in charge of the paperwork for ordering carbon monoxide for gassings.

Legal consequences: Sentenced to six and a half years in prison from 1959, when his role in Nazi war crimes emerged.

DESIGNER

AUGUST BECKER

Title: SS-*Untersturmführer* and chemist in RSHA.

Role: Participated in development of the first death van and supervised trucks in the Soviet Union, where he made sure that the vans were developed further.

Legal consequences: Received three years in prison after the war due to his SS status and a ten-year sentence in 1959, when his leading role in the development of the death vans emerged.

SLAUGHTERER

HERBERT LANGE

Title: SS-*Sturmbannführer* (equivalent to major) and commander of Chełmno death camp.

Role: The first officer to use death vans when he organised the killing of mentally ill patients. As commander of Chełmno death camp, he used gas trucks to kill prisoners.

Legal consequences: None. Herbert Lange died in April 1945 during the defence of Berlin.

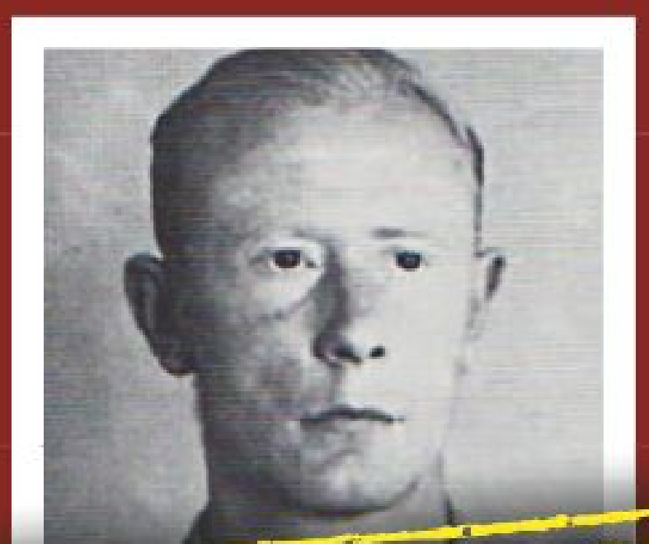
DEVELOPER

WALTER RAUFF

Title: SS-*Standartenführer* (equivalent to colonel).

Role: Leader of the entire RSHA programme of mobile gas chambers, and from 1941 had the final say when it came to the development and ordering of new gas trucks.

Legal consequences: Fled after the war to the Middle East and then to Chile. He was one of the most-wanted Nazi criminals, but died at large in Chile in 1984.



SUCCESSOR

HANS BOTHMANN

Title: SS-*Hauptsturmführer* (equivalent to captain), succeeded Lange as commander of Chełmno camp.

Role: Responsible for the murder of more than 100,000 Jews before the death camp closed in January 1945.

Legal consequences: Hanged himself in a British internment camp in April 1946 before being convicted of his war crimes.

GETTY IMAGES, CREATIVE COMMONS, MAHMOUT SABIT, THE CAMP MEN – SCHIFFER PUBLISHING

Katyn massacre

SOVIET DICTATOR SLAUGHTERED POLISH OFFICERS

In spring 1940, packed trains transported captured Polish officers from prison camps to the Katyn Forest. Three or four times a day Poles would arrive and three or four times a day shots and screams echoed through the trees. Three years later, the Germans uncovered thousands of bodies: proof of a gruesome war crime.

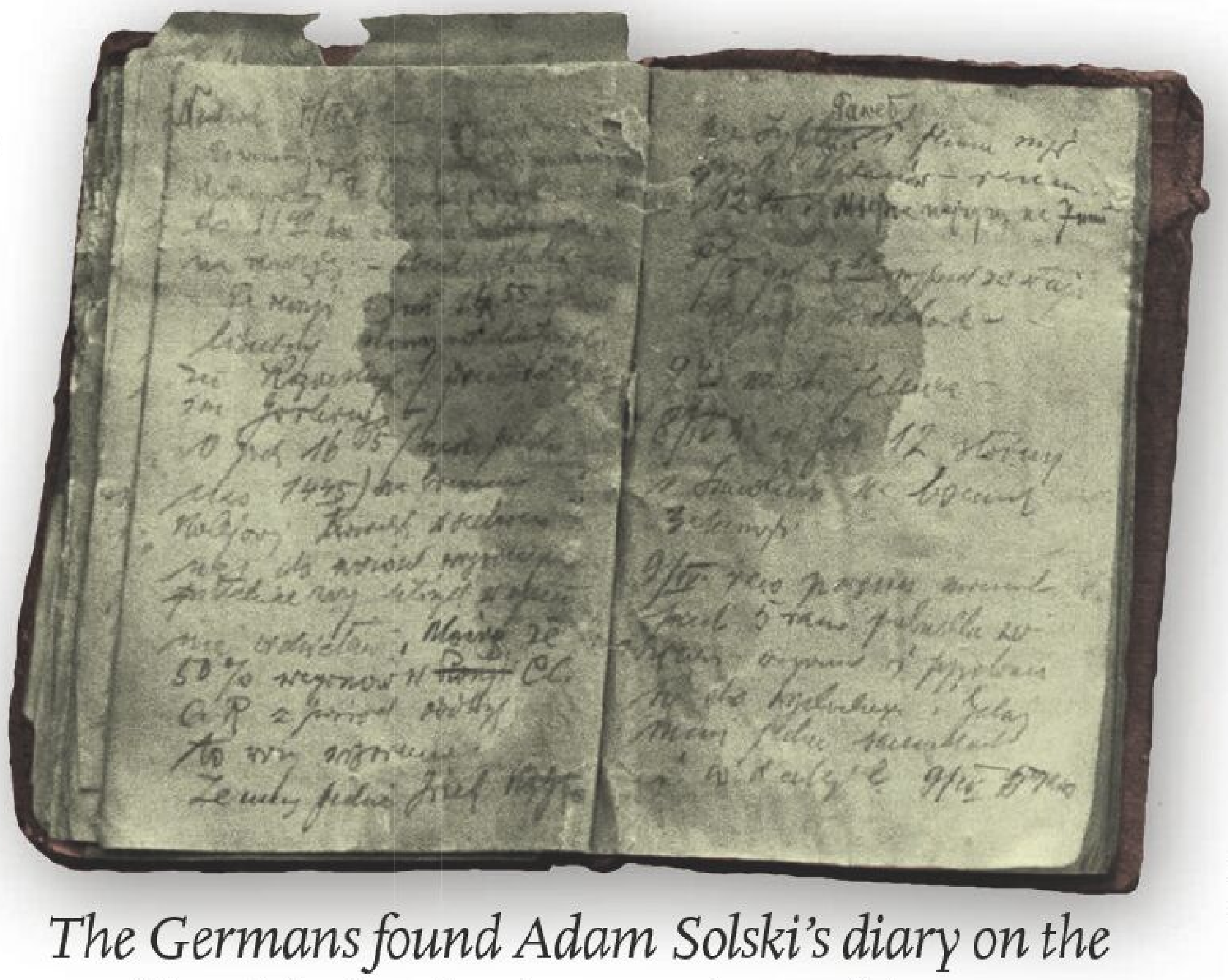
In spring 1943 the Germans unearthed the bodies of thousands of executed Polish officers in the Katyn Forest.

Katyn, 1940

THE STAGE IS SET

SOVIET UNION
Katyn

In the spring of 1940, several thousand Polish officers are interned in Soviet prison camps after the Red Army's invasion of eastern Poland the previous year. Stalin hopes that the officers can be converted to Communism, but when his plan fails, the dictator's head of security suggests eliminating them instead.



The Germans found Adam Solski's diary on the officer's body after it was exhumed in 1943.

Major Adam Solski could barely move. He was in a train packed with Polish army officers. 36 hours earlier, they had left their prison camp in Kozelsk in Russia and now they were jammed together on a train heading west. Few had slept during the night and those who had jerked awake when the train halted at a siding in Gnezdovo near Smolensk, around 150 km from Kozelsk.

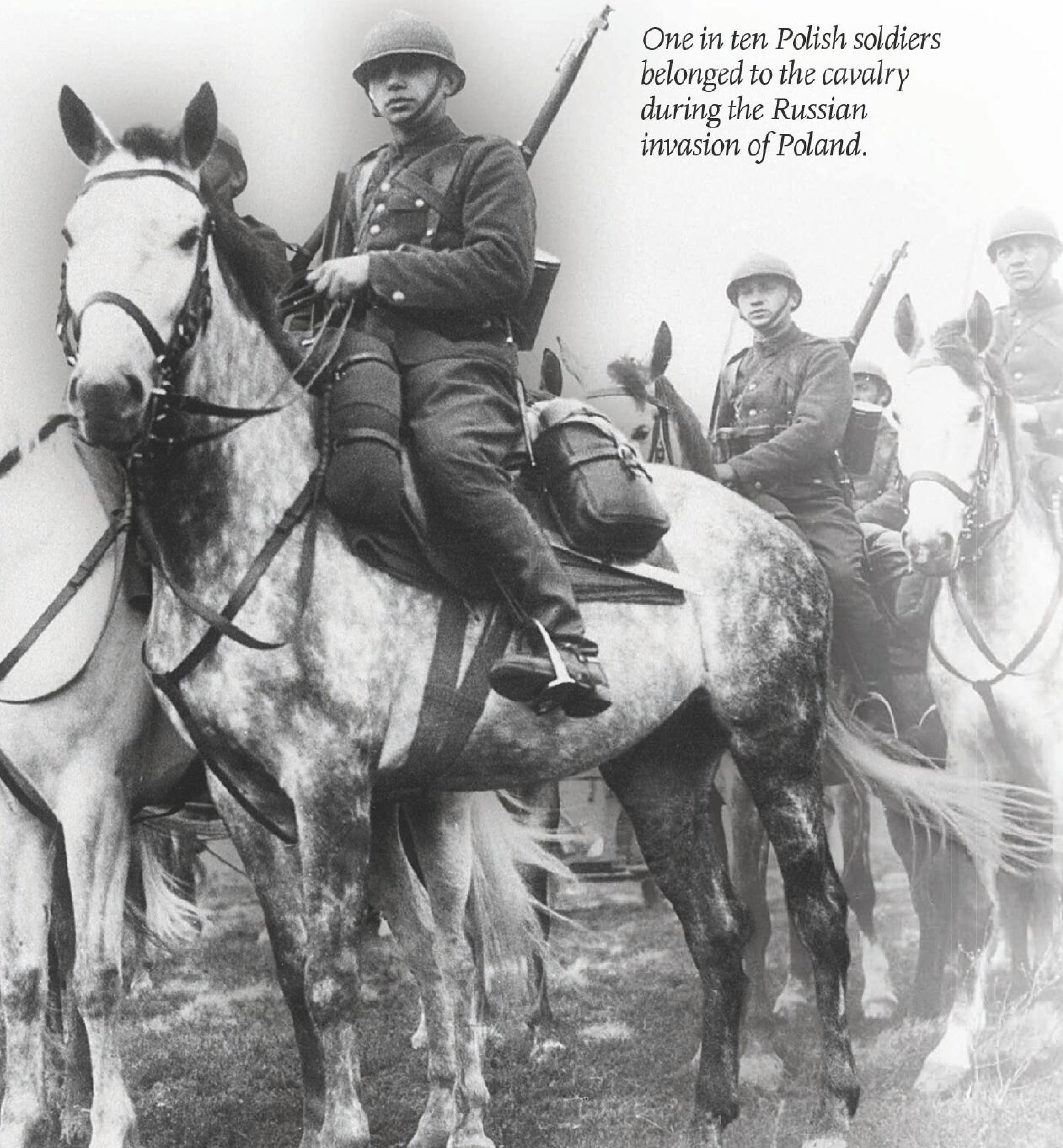
As the clock approached 05.00 on 9th April 1940, Red Army soldiers knocked on the carriage doors and signalled that the Poles should get ready to leave the train. The 45-year-old major scribbled a note in a small makeshift diary he kept hidden under his jacket: "We are to go somewhere by car. What next?"

Chains rattled as the prisoners' stood in the carriage, and the major moved off stiffly with around 100 other Poles into one of several parked lorries. The Russian soldiers shoved the prisoners one at a time into small cell-like cubicles in the back of the trucks. The Poles were jolted around as the lorries travelled a few kilometres along bumpy dirt roads to a forested area where some buildings stood among the trees.

"From dawn the day started in a special way," Solski wrote on arrival. "Taken somewhere into a wood, something like a country house. Here a special search. I was relieved of my watch, pointing to 6.30 am, asked about a wedding ring. Roubles, belt and pocket knife taken away."

These were the last words Solski wrote. Shortly afterwards, a Russian executioner put a 7.65-mm bullet through the nape of the Pole's neck. The corpse was then dumped, along with the hidden diary, into a mass grave. The execution was not the Soviets' first, and nor would it be their last.

Stalin's massacre of Polish officers in the Katyn Forest – 400 kilometres west of Moscow – had just begun.



One in ten Polish soldiers belonged to the cavalry during the Russian invasion of Poland.

Soviets held 15,000 Poles in camps

Eight months before the Soviets murdered Solski, German troops had invaded Poland. Germany and the Soviet Union had recently signed a secret non-aggression pact to divide Poland between them, so Stalin wasn't alarmed when Hitler invaded Western Poland on 1st September 1939.

The Germans were equally unperturbed when the Red Army crossed the Polish-Soviet border on 17th September to grab the Soviet Union's slice of the country. Stalin explained to the world that the invasion was necessary for security reasons and those in power in Paris and London chose to accept his reasoning. Meanwhile T-34 tanks rolled rapidly forward and after a few weeks the Poles were forced to disarm.

Like many other Polish soldiers, Solski had headed towards Hungary in the hopes of avoiding capture by the Red Army. But the major's flight ended in failure, and along with other Polish troops who'd attempted to flee, he found himself in the back of a Russian military truck heading for a prison camp in the East. The Russians took over 100,000 prisoners of war, but they only detained officers – the determination of rank being made by camp doctors . Stalin viewed the Polish officer class as dangerous and they were quickly shipped off to ▶

Victims of Katyn were extremely well preserved because the bodies were buried while it was cold.

Officers and police in the camps

	Kozelsk camp	Ostashkov camp	Starobielsk camp	TOTAL
Officers	999	-	1,348	2,347
NCOs	3,480	-	2,527	6,007
Ordinary	5	72	-	77
Officials	61	-	5	66
Prison officers	-	189	-	189
Chaplains	8	5	9	22
Police officers	-	5.987	-	5,987
Other	46	111	4	161
TOTAL	4,599	6,364	3,893	**14,856**

* The table shows the number of Polish officers and policemen in the three Soviet prison camps in the spring of 1940. The number of deaths has not been verified, but the majority of prisoners in the camps were probably executed.

UNIFORMS

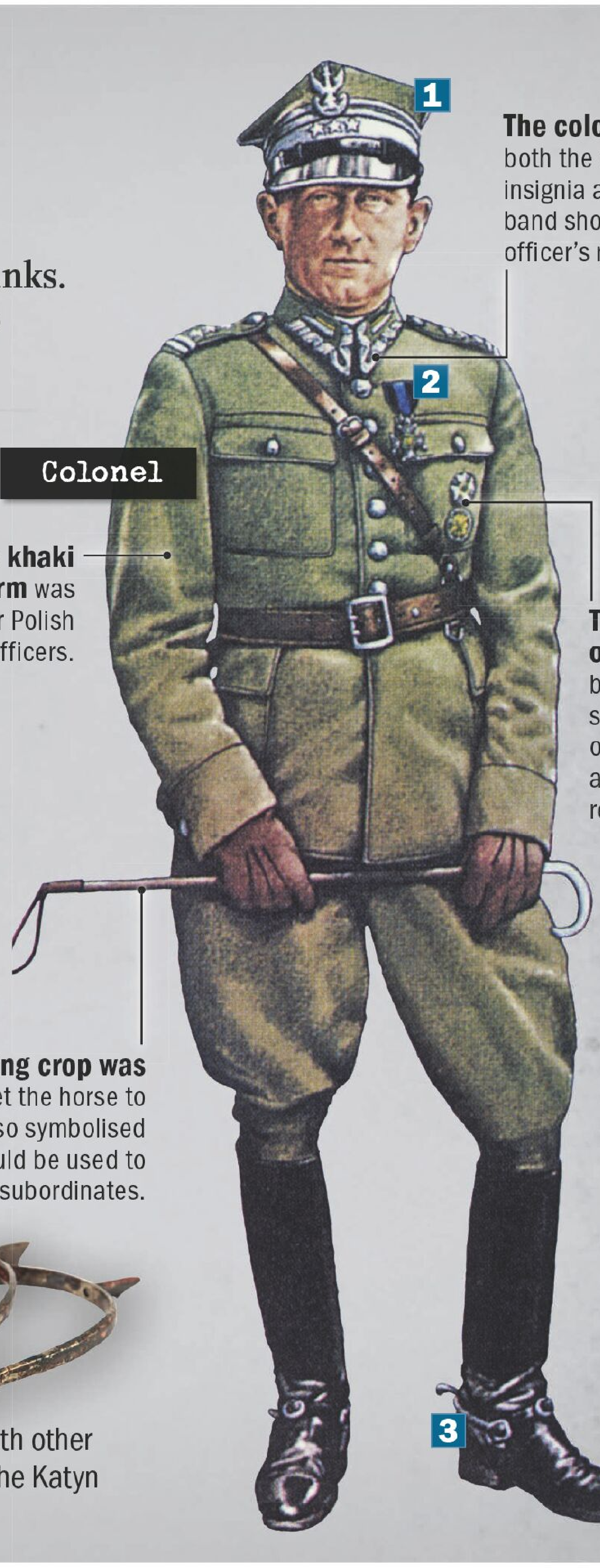
Polish cavalry fought on foot

It was a popular myth that Polish cavalry attacked tanks. In fact, the cavalry worked as scouts or infantry who dismounted and fought on foot.

[1] **The square CZAPKA** (cap) was traditionally worn by Polish troopers.

The crested Polish eagle adorned the hat.

An officer's rank was indicated by stars on the hat and shoulders. Three stars indicated colonel.



The colour of both the collar insignia and hat band showed the officer's regiment.

The khaki uniform was standard for Polish army officers.

The insignia on the left breast pocket showed the officer's current and former regiments.

The riding crop was helpful to get the horse to behave, but also symbolised power and could be used to quickly punish subordinates.

[2] **The War Order of Virtuti Militari** was awarded for bravery or given to officers for leadership.

[3] **Spurs** were found with other uniform items among the Katyn massacre victims.

three special camps in Kozelsk, Starobielsk and Ostashkov. The NKVD – the Soviet Union's feared security police – managed the camps, and as cold weather set in during November 1939, detainees and arrested officers arrived on a daily basis to start their lives behind barbed wire. Over 8,000 officers – half the entire Polish officer corps – ended up there. Many of them were drawn from the reserve forces, whose numbers were made up from those normally employed in civilian professions, such as doctors, lawyers, professors and priests. By interning the reserve officers, the NKVD could stifle Poland's intelligentsia and social elite, thereby reducing the risk of rebellion and anti-Communist resistance.

High-ranking officials and thousands of Polish police officers also found themselves in the camps, which in the autumn of 1939 accommodated nearly 15,000 people. The conditions in the camp were harsh, but the prisoners weren't made to work as the Russians in the special camps respected the international law that decreed officers should not be subject to forced labour during captivity. At first, the prisoners received adequate food rations and could write letters home,

> "Apply the highest level of punishment – shooting"
>
> Lavrentiy Beria in a memo to Joseph Stalin, 5th March 1940

even if the mail was censored. But once the biting frost set in, the captives began to realise how difficult life in the camps would be. Stanisław Swianiewicz was one of the few to survive Katyn, and later wrote:

"Accommodation was still cramped, there was not enough room to sleep and a great shortage of laundry facilities. Lice, that plague of Russian life, continued to torment the prisoners."

Inmates complained about everything from the constant squealing of the camp's pigs to the food. According to one inmate, "the standard daily fare was two servings of very thin soup, often with bits of rotten fish, rarely meat, and two small rations of soggy black bread". Yet Solski and his fellow prisoners passed the time in the belief that at some point they'd be released and wave goodbye to the disease and hunger. But the Russians had different plans.

NKVD CHIEF SUGGESTED MASS EXECUTION

Back in 1939, the NKVD's supreme leader, Lavrentiy Beria, had hoped that Polish prisoners of war could be 're-educated' to accept Soviet ideology. Daily propaganda films were shown to the Poles, but in March 1940 Beria suddenly gave up on the idea. Instead, the security chief declared that, "Every one of them is only waiting for his release to be able to enter actively in the struggle against Soviet power."

"Examine them as a matter of urgency, with the application of the highest measure of punishment – shooting", Beria urged Stalin in a memo on 5th March, and the dictator was happy to trust his security chief's judgement.

Nearly 15,000 Poles in Kozelsk, Starobielsk and Ostashkov now had a death sentence hanging over their heads. Beria's death list also included more than 7,000 Poles in Belarusian and Ukrainian prisons. Only a few hundred non-Polish prisoners were to be spared.

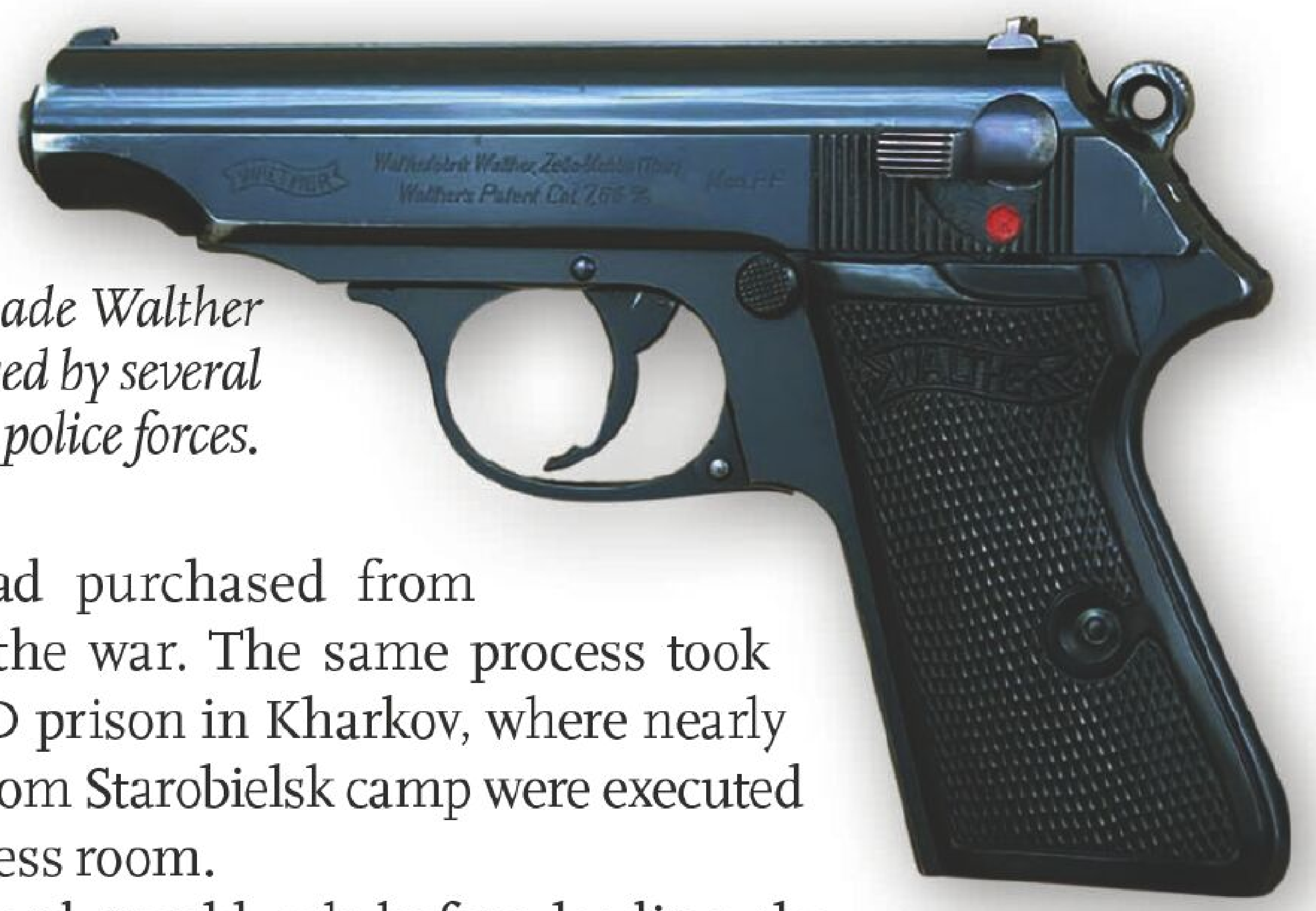
In Kozelsk, Solski had no idea of the Russians' plans, although guards were following camp protocols to an unusual degree. Some were suddenly nicer than usual, too – and the improving weather helped to lift spirits.

"March 1940 was a joyful month in the Kozelsk camp," Swianiewicz wrote. "It became known that the Soviet authorities had come to some decision regarding the closing-down of Kozelsk camp. Here nobody knew the plan, but everybody expected a change for the better."

On 3rd April, the first group of prisoners left. Most of the camp took this as a positive sign. On 7th April, around 700 of Kozelsk camp's 4,500 prisoners had left when Major Solski got the message he had been waiting for: "We have been ordered to pack up our things." Before departure the Poles were handed three herrings in grey paper and some bread for the journey. Solski also noted his departure: "At 14.55 we left the walls and the wires of the Kozelsk camp… At 16.55 at the Kozelsk railway siding, we were put into prison trucks."

OFFICERS' LIVES ENDED IN SLAUGHTERHOUSES

The hope of returning home, however, died when the prisoners disembarked the train at Gnezdovo. They were greeted by barking dogs and Soviet soldiers with bayonets on their rifles. Waiting lorries took them to a large NKVD complex in the Katyn Forest. There, the Polish prisoners were examined a final time before being escorted to a building and shot from behind with a Walther 7.65 mm pistol, which the Soviet regime had purchased from Germany before the war. The same process took place in the NKVD prison in Kharkov, where nearly 4,000 prisoners from Starobielsk camp were executed in a dark windowless room.


The German-made Walther pistol was used by several European police forces.

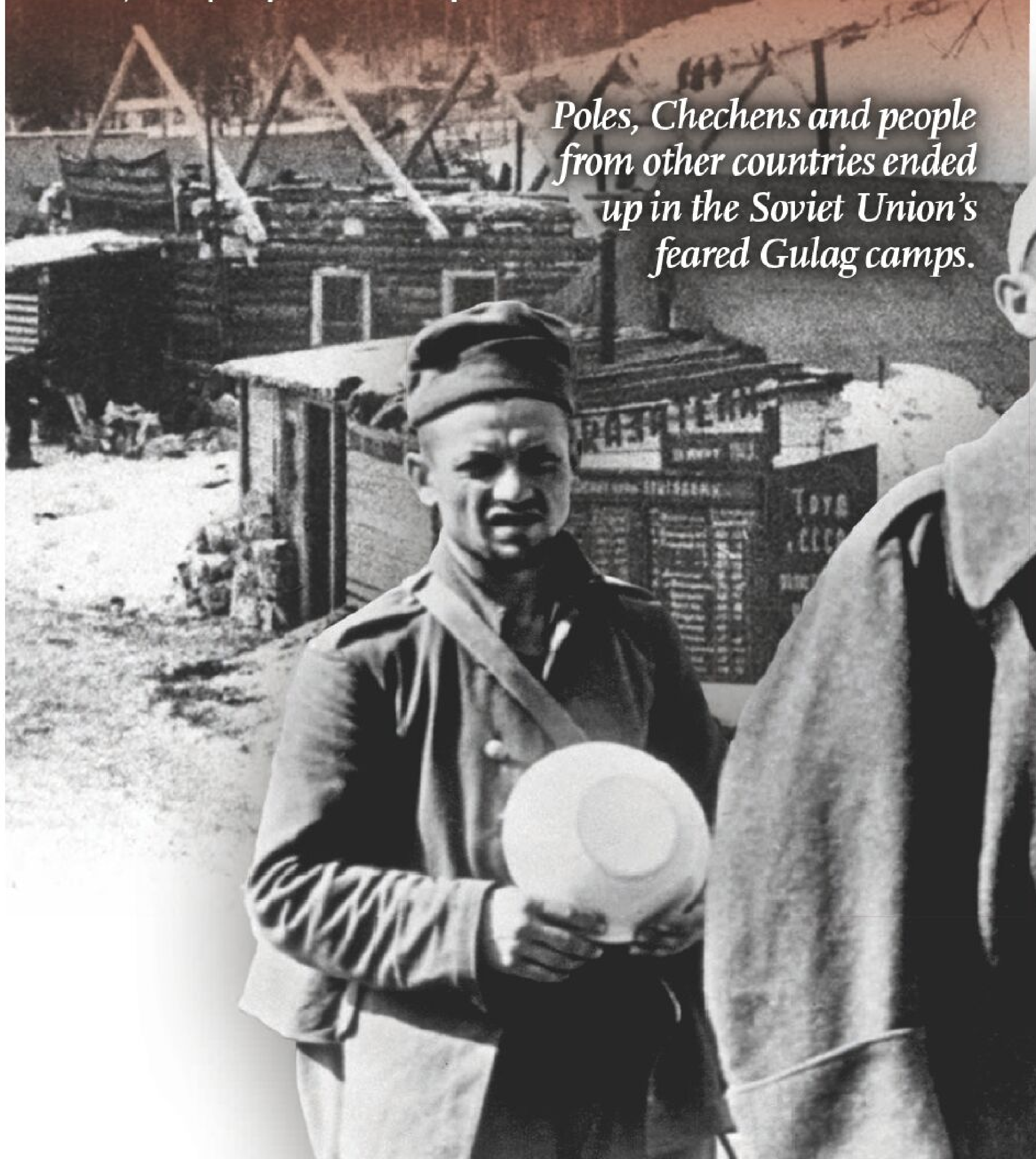
"May I?" A guard would ask before leading the prisoner into the dark room. "There was a clack and that was the end," NKVD officer Mitrofan Syromiatnikov revealed many years after the war. He also reported how, after the murders, the Soviets pulled the Poles' jackets over their heads before they were dragged away, to avoid bloodstains smearing the floor. In Ostashkov an orchestra played music to encourage more than 6,000 prisoners during their departure from the prison camp, but those who were transported to ▶

Deportations and killings eliminated unwanted groups

Although the Katyn massacre was in a class of its own, Stalin frequently used 'cleansing' as a method of getting rid of undesirable elements.

In 1940-41 large groups from Soviet-annexed territories in Poland, Romania and the Baltic countries were killed or deported to the Gulag camps in Siberia. Some of the 'anti-Soviet elements' in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were put in front of firing squads for refusing to back Communist candidates in restricted elections.

When the Red Army retook areas of the Caucasus and Kalmykia, more than 160,000 people were sent to Siberia on charges of collaborating with the Germans. And in February 1944, a special force of 120,000 men was sent to the city of Grozny to monitor the expulsion of people from Chechnya and Ingushetia. In just over a week 478,479 people were deported.


Poles, Chechens and people from other countries ended up in the Soviet Union's feared Gulag camps.

NAME **LAVRENTIY BERIA**

TITLE HEAD OF THE NKVD

1899-1953

Georgian was Stalin's executioner

In 1938, Joseph Stalin brought Lavrentiy Beria from his birthplace in Georgia to Moscow. The Soviet dictator had noticed the Georgian's talent for purging political opponents and put him at the head of the security police, the NKVD. Beria planned and carried out acts of political terrorism during the last 15 years of Stalin's regime.

- **Headed up atomic bomb project.**
- **Was executed in 1953.**

the prison in Tver shared the same fate as those in Kharkov and Katyn: summary execution.

In Tver, chief executioner Vasily Blokhin already had the deaths of thousands of peasants and workers on his conscience. Over several nights during the spring of 1940 Blokhin shot almost 300 Poles, dressed in an apron, long gloves and a leather cap to shield himself from the blood and bodily fluids. In Kharkov and Tver the Russians drove bodies away at night in closed trucks and dumped them in graves outside the cities. In Katyn, Beria's NKVD complex lay in the woods, and it was only a short trip to eight mass graves hidden among the trees.

After the Kozelsk camp massacre of around 4,500 Poles was over, the Russians scooped sand and earth over the bodies before the soldiers planted small birch trees over them. The tracks were erased – or so the Russians thought. But Katyn's secret would be unearthed just three years later.

NAZIS FOUND THE MASS GRAVES

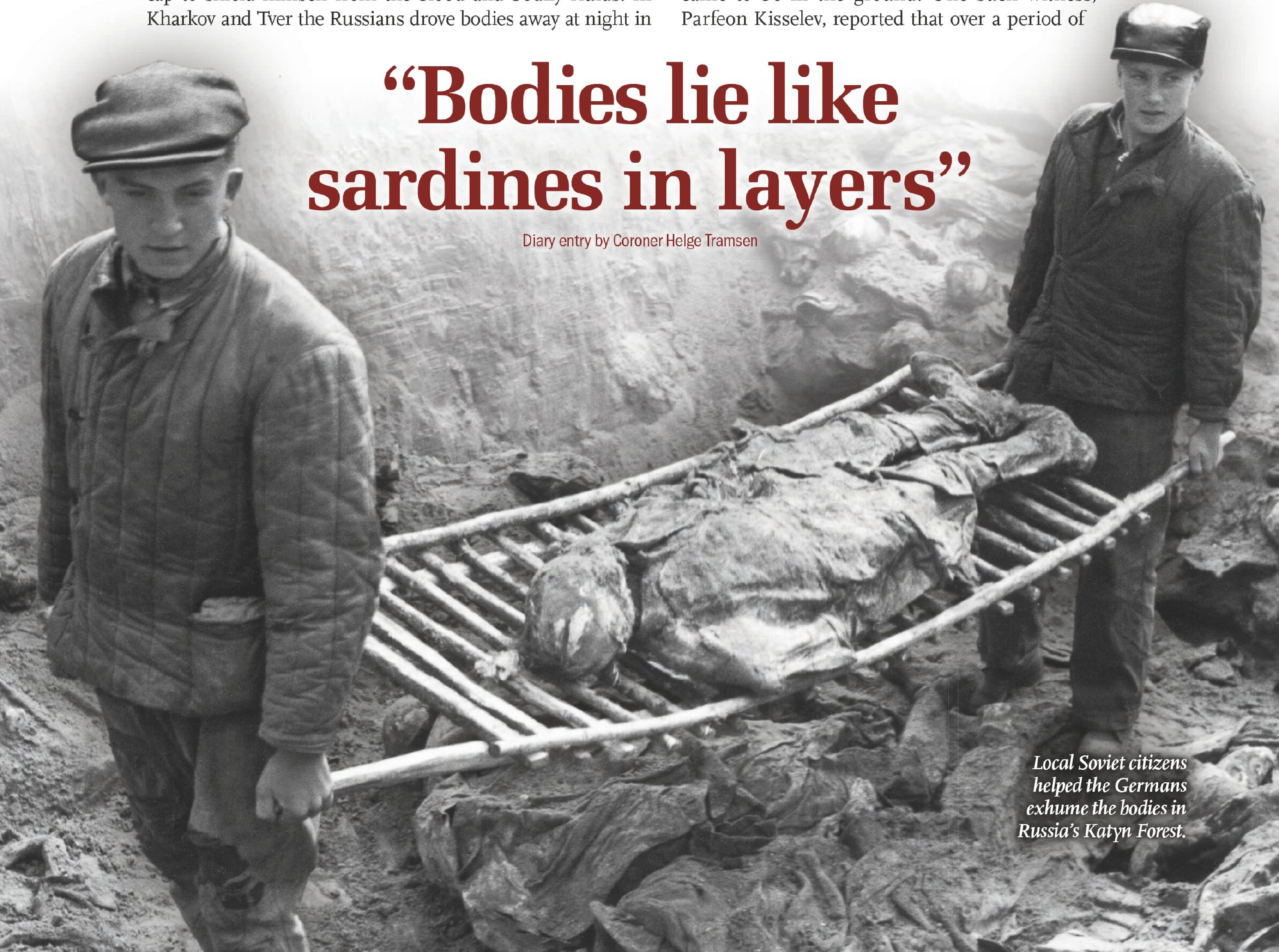
On a frosty January day in 1943 Colonel Friedrich Ahrens of the Wehrmacht was wandering in the Katyn Forest, which had fallen into German hands after Hitler broke the pact with Stalin and invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. Suddenly, a wolf appeared among the trees. Following the tracks later with an expert, Ahrens came across a mound where the ground had been disturbed.

"One could see that they were graves and that the wolf had been digging for bones," Ahrens later reported. "I had investigations made as to what kind of bones these were. The doctors told me 'human bones'."

The colonel immediately contacted Berlin, and in late February, with help from locals, the Germans began to dig up the frost-hard ground. After the first bodies began to appear, local farmers were quick to explain how the corpses came to be in the ground. One such witness, Parfeon Kisselev, reported that over a period of

"Bodies lie like sardines in layers"

Diary entry by Coroner Helge Tramsen



Local Soviet citizens helped the Germans exhume the bodies in Russia's Katyn Forest.

four or five weeks in the spring of 1940, prisoners were brought in three or four times a day, and that he regularly heard shots and cries from his home.

The massacre in Katyn was convenient for Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels. "We shall be able to live on it for a couple of weeks", he wrote in mid-April. Goebbels sent a commission of 12 independent European forensic experts to Katyn to examine the bodies and deny accusations that the Germans had staged the discovery of the graves.

The bodies were well preserved because the Russians had buried the victims while conditions were still relatively cold, so no flies and maggots had come to devour the victims. Despite this, Danish coroner Helge Tramsen confided to his diary that they still smelled disgusting. He further noted that, "[the bodies] lie like sardines stacked in layers, with their heads in the same direction. Everyone is lying on his stomach with his arms twisted back and skulls shot back."

The graves also contained Polish uniforms, diaries, letters and military passes, allowing more than half the bodies to be identified – among them Major Adam Solski. The commission concluded that the Poles had been massacred, and Goebbels filmed the exhumation to be broadcast in cinemas throughout German-occupied Europe.

The Nazi's joy was short-lived, however, for the discovery of bullets in the Katyn graves revealed that the massacre had been carried out using German-made Walther 7.65-mm pistols.

"It is essential that the incident remains a top secret", wrote Goebbels in May 1943, but the news was impossible to hide. The Minister had to acknowledge the situation a few months later when the Germans were forced to withdraw from the area.

"Unfortunately we have had to give up Katyn. The Bolsheviks undoubtedly will soon 'find' that we shot 12,000 Polish officers." His prediction proved accurate.

SOVIETS DENIED RESPONSIBILITY

The Germans hadn't finished digging up all the bodies in the Katyn Forest before the sound of Russian tanks approached Smolensk. Quickly, the Germans had to cover the graves and retreat, and the NKVD took control of the area in a bid to destroy and remove the remaining evidence. Then the Russians planted new trees and forbade civilians to enter the area.

As Goebbels predicted, the Soviet government went on the offensive. During the Nuremberg trials, the Russians demanded that the Katyn massacre be classed as a German war crime, masterminded by Colonel Ahrens. The Russians' 'proof' was the German cartridge cases and bullets found at the scene. In addition, the NKVD forced a Bulgarian member of the Commission to bear false witness: if the doctor did not support the Soviet accusations, he would be executed.

"In my opinion these corpses were buried for a shorter period of time than three years", he duly testified, insinuating that the deaths had occurred while Katyn was in Nazi hands.

Neither the cartridges nor the doctor's statement was enough to pin the blame on the Germans, however. The Katyn incident disappeared from the list of crimes heard at the Nuremberg. No verdict was reached, and no one was ever held to account for the deaths of those 22,000 Poles who, like Adam Solski, ended up buried en masse in the Soviet Union's frozen ground.

Massacre faded into obscurity

For 50 years the Soviets prevented any investigation of the slaughter in the Katyn Forest, where around 4,600 Polish prisoners of war were executed.

Although the Soviet Union denied being behind the Katyn slaughter after World War II, the regime's responsibility for the massacre was quickly confirmed. A US committee that had interviewed members from the International 1943 Commission ruled in 1952 that the murders could only have been carried out when the Katyn Forest was in Soviet hands.

Despite the damning evidence, the Soviet Union stubbornly continued to deny responsibility for the massacre until 1990-91, when the outside world gained access to secret Soviet documents that the KGB had kept hidden for nearly 50 years. The Russians, however, refused to hand over other documents about the massacre, including its own internal investigations into the matter, so the exact death toll is still unknown.

In 2010, politicians in the Russian parliament adopted a resolution that the secret documents "showed that the Katyn crime was carried out on the direct orders of Stalin and other Soviet officials". Russians continue to refer to the incident as a 'political crime' while Poland insists that the Katyn massacre was outright genocide.

Reich Health Leader Leonardo Conti received a report on the Katyn massacre in 1943.

Reimond Speleers
Ferenc Orsós
Leonardo Conti

JAPAN GOES TO WAR

1937-1941

Early summer 1937: Japanese soldiers invade central China, following the plans of their powerful generals, to extend the Japanese Empire across all of eastern Asia. Motivated by a racist ideology with a divine emperor at its centre, the Japanese brutally oppress and abuse the conquered Chinese through nearly four years of war. Conquest and plunder fuel ambition and Japan's powerful elite declare their readiness to take on the world's strongest imaginable enemy: the United States of America.

1937-41

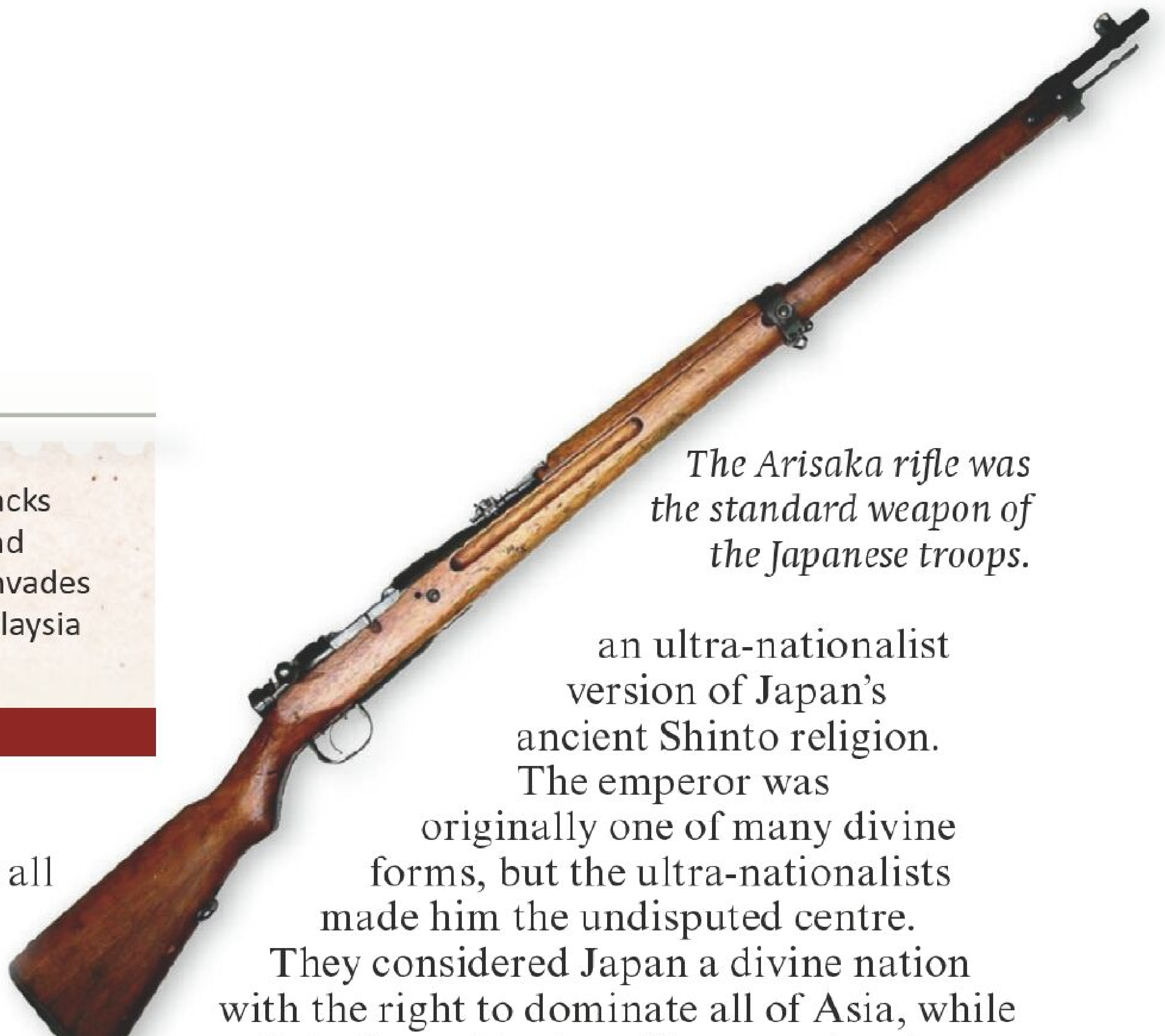
1937 Japanese forces in Manchuria invade China and occupy Nanjing.

1940 Japan enters northern French Indochina.

1940 Japan, Germany and Italy sign the Tripartite Pact in Berlin.

1941 USA and Britain close all oil exports to Japan.

1941 Japan attacks Pearl Harbor and subsequently invades Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand.



The Arisaka rifle was the standard weapon of the Japanese troops.

On 13th December, 1937, 30 Japanese soldiers broke into a private home in the southeastern part of Nanjing. On that day, the Chinese capital fell to the Imperial Japanese Army, and the Japanese rushed through the streets of the city. As the soldiers broke into the house, they killed the owner of the home. Then they shot the homeowner's wife and a tenant before turning their attention to the tenant's wife. Brutally, they tore off the woman's clothes, raped her, forced perfume bottles into her vagina and killed her with their bayonets. The soldiers also stabbed her one-year-old infant to death.

Further inside the house, the soldiers found the woman's parents and two daughters. The old couple were immediately shot, after which the soldiers threw themselves on the girls of 14 and 16 and raped them.

Before the soldiers left, they executed the homeowner's two children of five and two years. The eldest was killed with a bayonet. The youngest they beheaded with a sword. The only survivors of the house were an eight-year-old girl and her four-year-old sister. The two had hidden under a blanket.

The murders in the house in southeastern Nanjing were common. In homes, hospitals, shops, and places all over the fallen capital, 50,000 Japanese soldiers murdered, mutilated and raped the citizens throughout the next six weeks in one of the bloodiest massacres experienced throughout world history.

800,000 Japanese colonists immigrate to the vassal state of Manchuria, North China in 1931.

A shocked outside world christened the suffering of the 500,000 city inhabitants as "The Rape of Nanjing". Historians have never been able to determine the extent of the massacre, but it is clear that Japanese soldiers raped between 20,000 and 80,000 women, while the number killed was at least 200,000. Chinese historian Sun Zhawei set the death toll as high as 377,400 – more than the total number of people killed after the atomic bomb blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

IMPERIAL BRAINWASHING

The seeds of Japanese cruelty in China were planted many years earlier. At home in Japan, an increasingly fanatical, ultra-nationalist cult arose around Emperor Hirohito. The Japanese officially reestablished the emperor in the late 19th century and regarded him as a living god. His word was all-knowing and his command would never be questioned. Where Germany had Nazism and Italy Fascism, Japan in the 1930s was steeped in an ultra-nationalist version of Japan's ancient Shinto religion. The emperor was originally one of many divine forms, but the ultra-nationalists made him the undisputed centre. They considered Japan a divine nation with the right to dominate all of Asia, while politically and in the military ranks, the ultra-nationalists took power.

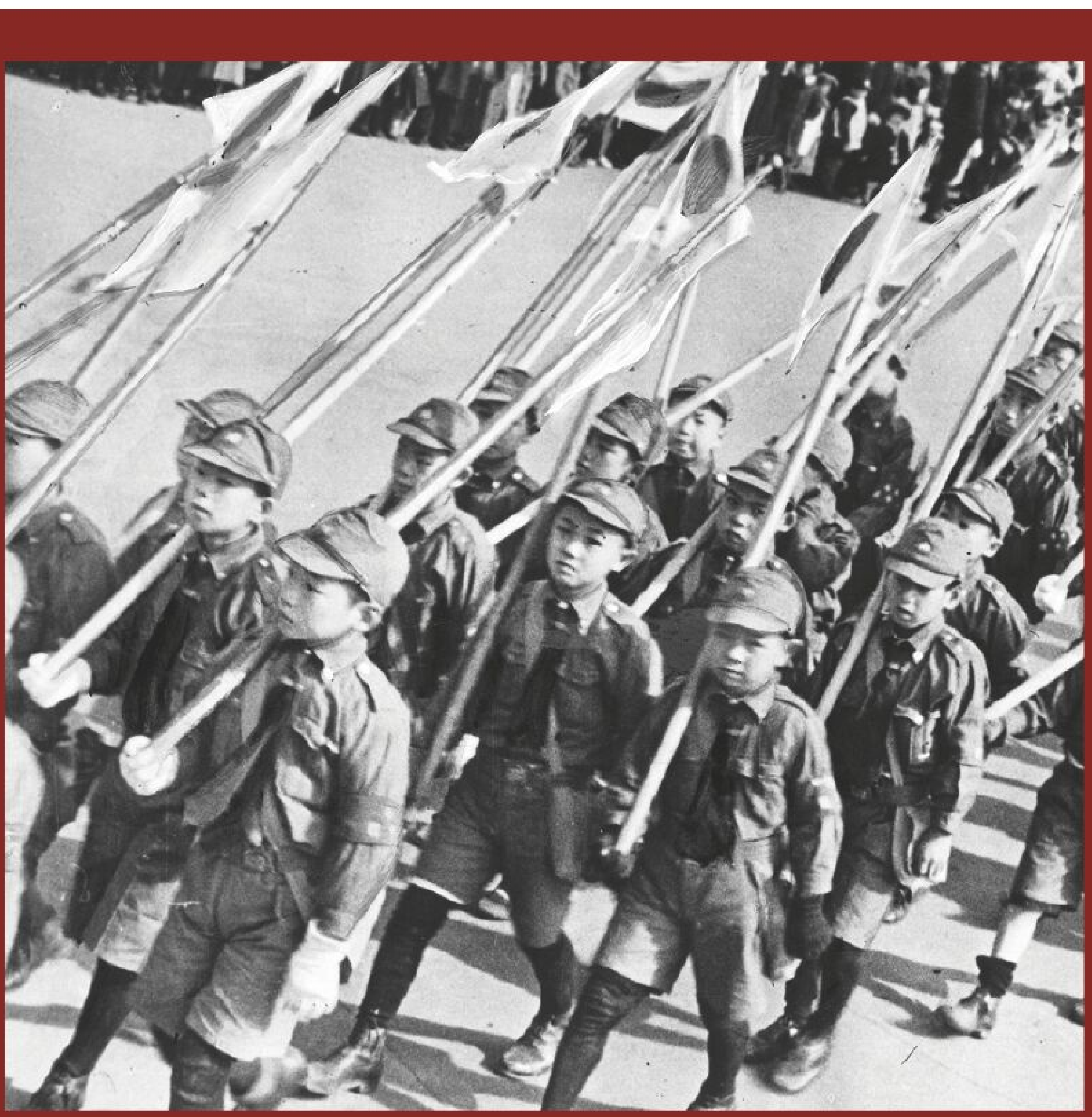
The growing importance of the emperor was a tremendous advantage for Japan's ambitious military generals, as the constitution stated that the armed forces were directly under the emperor and not subject to political control. By lifting the emperor's words to law, the nationalist generals only required convincing one man to get their way: the young emperor Hirohito, who was only 25 when he climbed the throne in Tokyo in 1926.

The emperor's god-like status also allowed the ultra-nationalists to brainwash the population. The Japanese were taught that if an order was presented as the emperor's will, it was a divine command that must be obeyed. A schoolchild during the war, Wakana Nishihara explains the meaning in his own words:

"In Japan, they said, 'Die for the Sake of the Emperor.' No one could disobey an order to die for him."

DESIRE FOR BRITISH-TYPE COLONIES

From the beginning of the 1930s, the economic world crisis following the stock market crash in the USA hit the overpopulated and already financially



BRAINWASH: many years of indoctrination had preceded Japan's conquest. Here, scouts in military uniform celebrate the emperor's 2,598 year reign in 1938.

RAW MATERIALS: Japan's invasions of its neighbours would provide raw materials for its growing population.

HOME FRONT: while the men went to war, women worked in the munitions factories at home in Japan.

JOHN RABE *1882-1950*

NANJING'S GOOD NAZI

■ Amidst the horrors of Japan's siege of Nanjing, an unlikely hero emerged: the head of the local Nazi party, John Rabe. Rabe was a German businessman in the Chinese capital and together with other foreigners founded the Nanjing International Committee, which established the Nanjing Safety Zone.

The zone meant for Chinese who had lost their homes during the Japanese bombing was intended to be closed after the Japanese invasion. Instead, the zone became a shelter for approximately 200,000 Chinese from the slaughter of the Japanese.

John Rabe used his membership in the Nazi party to intervene in the sacking of the city.

He wrote to Hitler in an attempt to stop the Japanese atrocities and pleaded with the Japanese city leaders to take action.

German Businessman – Documented the Japanese atrocities – Known as "Nanjing's Living Buddha"

pressured Japan exceptionally hard. Exports were halved and the incomes of the population fell by one third. These developments gave the ultra-nationalists even more wind in their sails. Their solution to the crisis was not unlike Hitler's solution to Germany's corresponding struggle of the same period: the Japanese must improve their situation by conquering neighbours to gain resources – such as oil and agricultural land.

The nationalist military leaders and their supporters also held the western wave of colonisation in the 18th and 19th centuries as an example to follow. If the USA, Great Britain, France and the Netherlands could take over large lands and empty them for oil, minerals and agricultural products, Japan could do the same. The message was spread through propaganda. Much of the population responded with cheers when agitators proclaimed that Japan had not lost a war throughout its 2,600-year history and therefore would never do so.

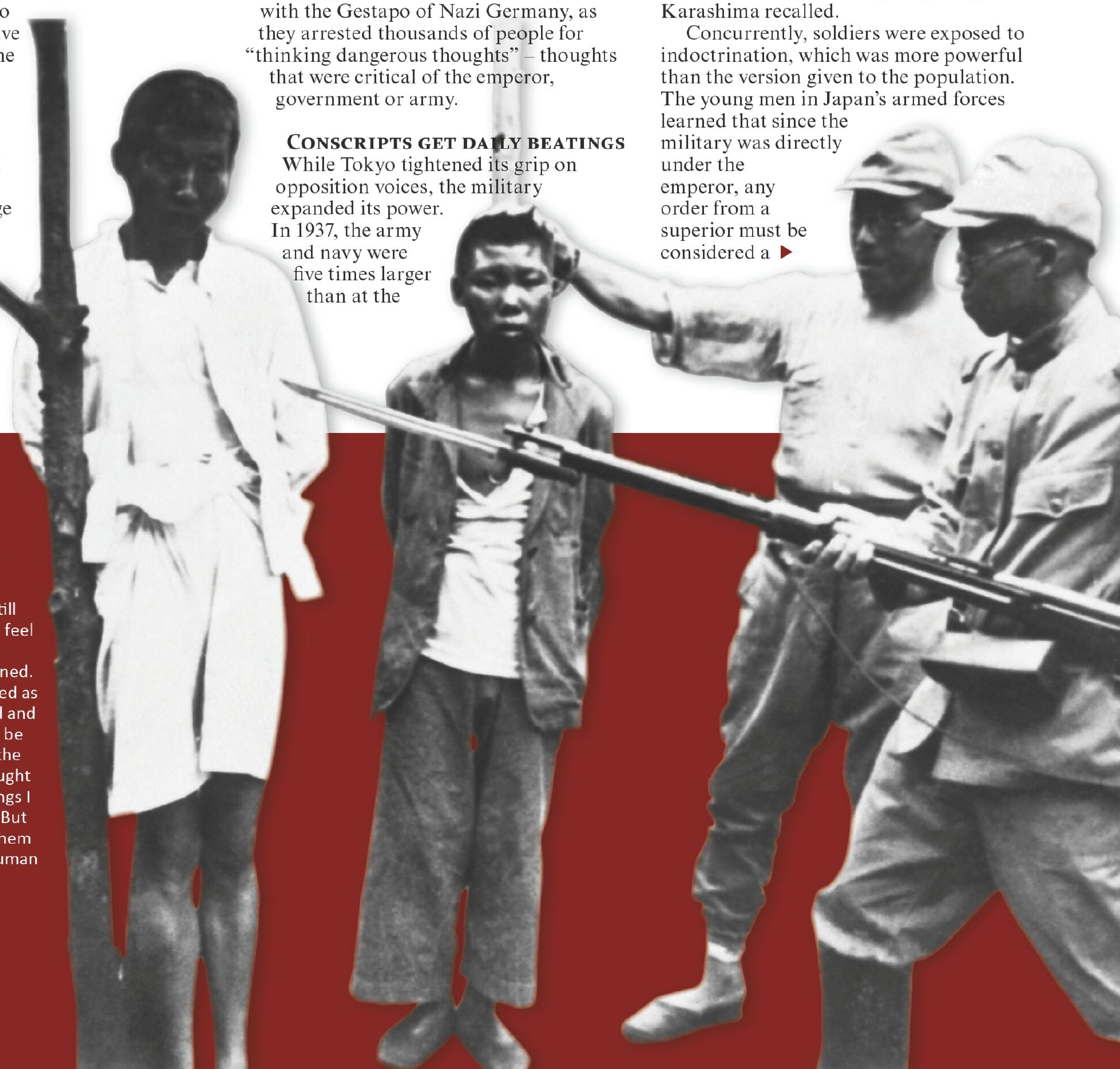
Critical voices were brutally silenced. Seven prominent politicians, including two prime ministers, were murdered by the ultra-nationalists. Both politicians and the general public learned to fear the Tokyo intelligence unit, which was known as the "thought police". The unit was compared with the Gestapo of Nazi Germany, as they arrested thousands of people for "thinking dangerous thoughts" – thoughts that were critical of the emperor, government or army.

CONSCRIPTS GET DAILY BEATINGS

While Tokyo tightened its grip on opposition voices, the military expanded its power. In 1937, the army and navy were five times larger than at the turn of the century, and much of the state budget went into developing military equipment and growing its arsenal.

To control the many new conscripts, the officers introduced rigorous discipline to the barracks. Physical punishment and beatings became commonplace in Japan's military, where officers occasionally set the conscripts to beat each other to impose military order. "Sometimes in the evening we couldn't eat our food because our faces were so swollen," conscript Toyoshige Karashima recalled.

Concurrently, soldiers were exposed to indoctrination, which was more powerful than the version given to the population. The young men in Japan's armed forces learned that since the military was directly under the emperor, any order from a superior must be considered a ▶



ABUSES: In China, Japanese soldiers and guards used civilians as well as captured Chinese soldiers as targets for bayonet training.

"The first time you still have a conscience and feel bad," Japanese Officer Yoshio Tshuchia explained.

"But if you are labelled as courageous, honoured and given merit ... that will be the driving power for the second time. If I'd thought of them as human beings I couldn't have done it. But because I thought of them as animals or below human beings, we did it."

JAPANESE DR MENGELE USED CHINESE AS GUINEA PIGS

Military Physician Ishii Shiro's Unit 731 mistreated thousands of Chinese. The atrocities were long unknown to the world because after the war, the US hid the atrocities in return for sharing the results.

DISEASES: Unit 731's physicians infected subjects with anthrax, cholera, plague and smallpox – the aim was to develop both vaccines and biological weapons.

CONTAGION: plague-sick rats were thrown over Chinese cities, anthrax poured into drinking water, and anthrax-infected chocolates distributed to children in Nanjing to find the most effective way to spread biological weapons.

EXPOSURE TO EXTREME COLD: in order to investigate the effect of frostbite, Shiro's subjects' arms or feet were frozen until they were hard as stone – before being slowly thawed out.

PRESSURE CHAMBERS: the Japanese knew the effect of high pressure on the human body. Living Chinese were placed in pressure chambers, and the pressure slowly increased. Everything was filmed.

In a huge "factory" in Pingfang in North China, Unit 731 tested biological weapons.

> "We called the Chinese 'Chancorro', that meant below human"

divine command. When Japan embarked on a campaign, it was a holy war.

Officers constantly bombarded the soldiers with the idea that Japan was superior to Asia and that the Japanese deserved more land. The rhetoric was specifically directed at China, where since 1931 Japan had ruled over a de facto colony, Manchuria. The Japanese, at best, considered the Chinese in northern China as cheap labour and peasants who could, if necessary, be removed to make room for more Japanese colonists. It was such a simple and barbaric solution.

Yoshio Tsuchiya served in Japan's secret military police in Manchuria and has since explained how the Japanese looked at their Chinese subjects.

"We called the Chinese 'Chancorro', that meant below human, like bugs or animals. Whereas the Japanese are a superior race, which had been in existence for 2,600 years, the Chinese were inferior. The Chinese didn't belong to the human race. That was the way we looked at it."

Many of the soldiers who murdered and raped the regular everyday people in Nanjing's streets and homes in the winter of 1937-38 had a similar view of the Chinese. Shockingly they considered that putting a bayonet into a Chinese child was just like smashing a cockroach.

In Japan, the people were told nothing about the brutal massacres in China's capital. And in their ignorance, the soldiers were instead hailed as heroes, and Nanjing's fall celebrated with marches and parades through the country's large cities.

However, Chinese forces struggled on deeper inside China. The battles were incredibly brutal and new Japanese conscripts were welcomed to the front and initiated with violent rituals where they had to prove their worth by killing Chinese civilians or prisoners of war with bayonets, knives or swords.

Pact with Hitler and Mussolinii

In the early autumn of 1940, Japan invaded northern French Indochina in an attempt to cut off the Chinese from the south. Beyond China lay dreams of a massive empire that would dominate half of the world. The possibility of such a situation was irresistible.

Japan's leaders, however, realised they could not wage major campaigns alone – they needed to secure a crucial alliance with like-minded rulers in Europe: Adolf Hitler of Germany and Italy's Benito Mussolini. Japan's desire for an alliance with the two European leaders was satisfied on 27th September, 1940.

In Berlin the streets were draped with the flags of Germany, Italy and Japan surrounding the Japanese embassy where Japan's ambassador to Germany, Saburo Kurusu, met at an historic moment to add his signature on the same document as Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop from Germany and Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano from Italy.

With the Tripartite Pact, Japan, Germany and Italy promised to help each other politically, economically and militarily if any one of the countries was attacked by a fourth country that was not yet active in the war. Hitler personally attended the session – clearly satisfied that thanks to the new alliance, his European opponents would soon have another powerful enemy to deal with.

The USA blocks oil for Japan

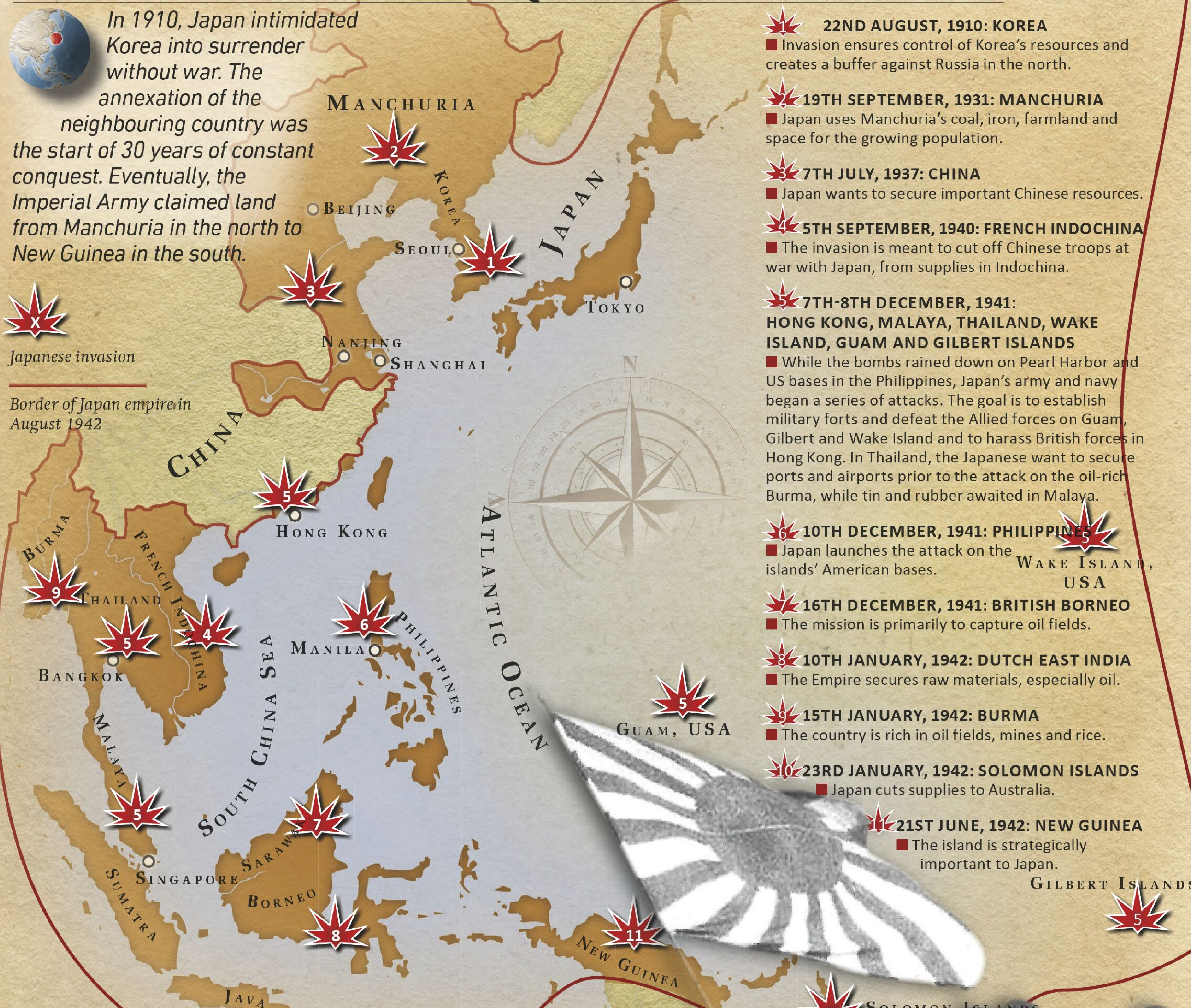
The Japanese hoped that the pact would ensure the United States would also have to wage war in Europe when Japan and the US began hostilities – something Japanese leaders considered inevitable.

The USA had long been an outspoken critic of Japan's invasion of Manchuria, and American companies had banned exporting important resources such as iron, steel, airplanes and aviation fuel to the resource poor Japan.

The Tripartite Pact and Japan's continuing attempts to subjugate French Indochina frustrated USA's President Roosevelt who then reconsidered taking ▶

NEIGHBOURS WERE CONQUERED OVER 30 YEARS

In 1910, Japan intimidated Korea into surrender without war. The annexation of the neighbouring country was the start of 30 years of constant conquest. Eventually, the Imperial Army claimed land from Manchuria in the north to New Guinea in the south.


X Japanese invasion
Border of Japan empire in August 1942
Manchuria
Korea
Beijing
Seoul
Japan
Tokyo
Nanjing
Shanghai
China
Hong Kong
Burma
French Indochina
Thailand
Bangkok
Malaya
South China Sea
Manila
Philippines
Atlantic Ocean
Wake Island, USA
Guam, USA
Sumatra
Singapore
Sarawak
Borneo
Java
New Guinea
Gilbert Islands
Solomon Islands
N
0 500 1,000 km

1 22ND AUGUST, 1910: KOREA
- Invasion ensures control of Korea's resources and creates a buffer against Russia in the north.

2 19TH SEPTEMBER, 1931: MANCHURIA
- Japan uses Manchuria's coal, iron, farmland and space for the growing population.

3 7TH JULY, 1937: CHINA
- Japan wants to secure important Chinese resources.

4 5TH SEPTEMBER, 1940: FRENCH INDOCHINA
- The invasion is meant to cut off Chinese troops at war with Japan, from supplies in Indochina.

5 7TH-8TH DECEMBER, 1941: HONG KONG, MALAYA, THAILAND, WAKE ISLAND, GUAM AND GILBERT ISLANDS
- While the bombs rained down on Pearl Harbor and US bases in the Philippines, Japan's army and navy began a series of attacks. The goal is to establish military forts and defeat the Allied forces on Guam, Gilbert and Wake Island and to harass British forces in Hong Kong. In Thailand, the Japanese want to secure ports and airports prior to the attack on the oil-rich Burma, while tin and rubber awaited in Malaya.

6 10TH DECEMBER, 1941: PHILIPPINES
- Japan launches the attack on the islands' American bases.

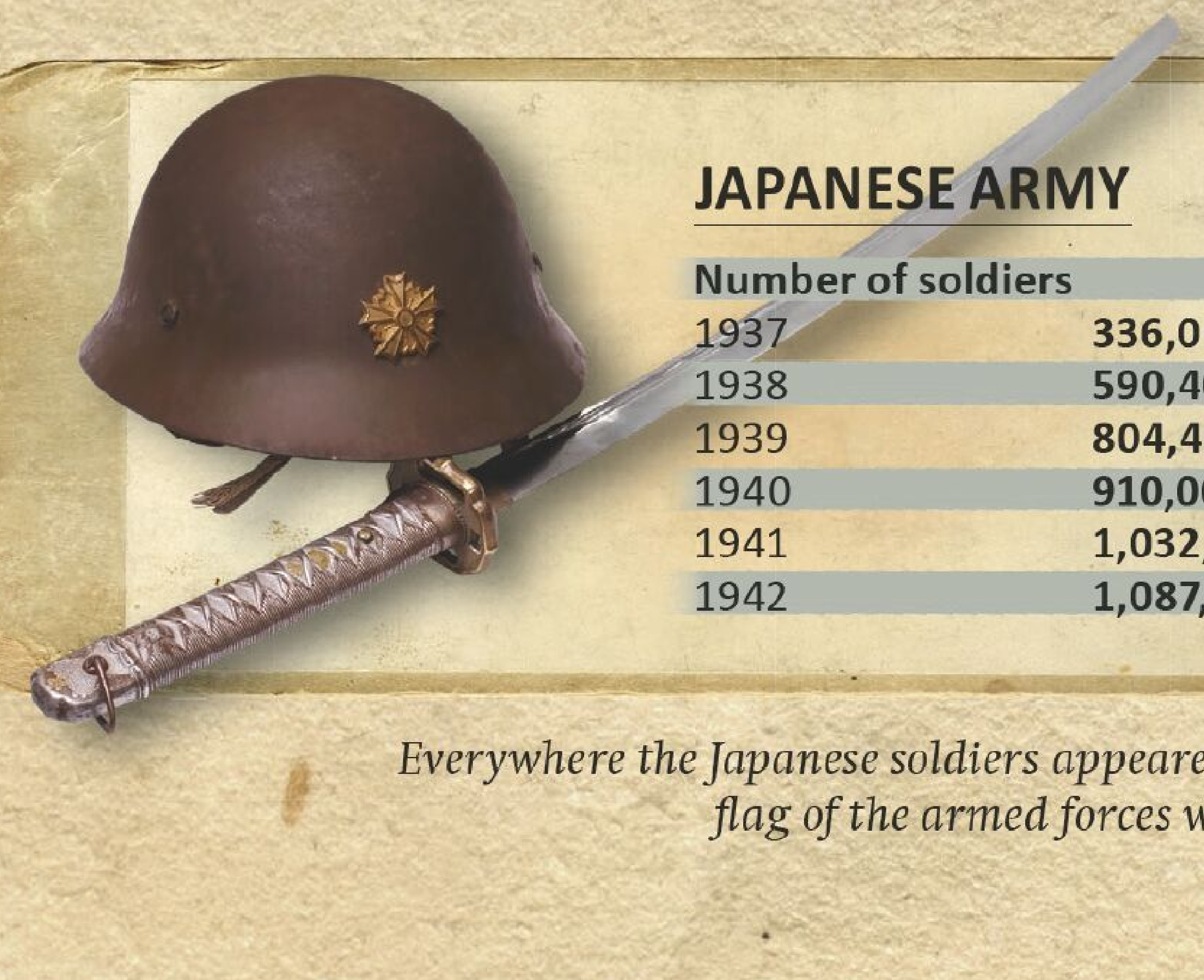
7 16TH DECEMBER, 1941: BRITISH BORNEO
- The mission is primarily to capture oil fields.

8 10TH JANUARY, 1942: DUTCH EAST INDIA
- The Empire secures raw materials, especially oil.

9 15TH JANUARY, 1942: BURMA
- The country is rich in oil fields, mines and rice.

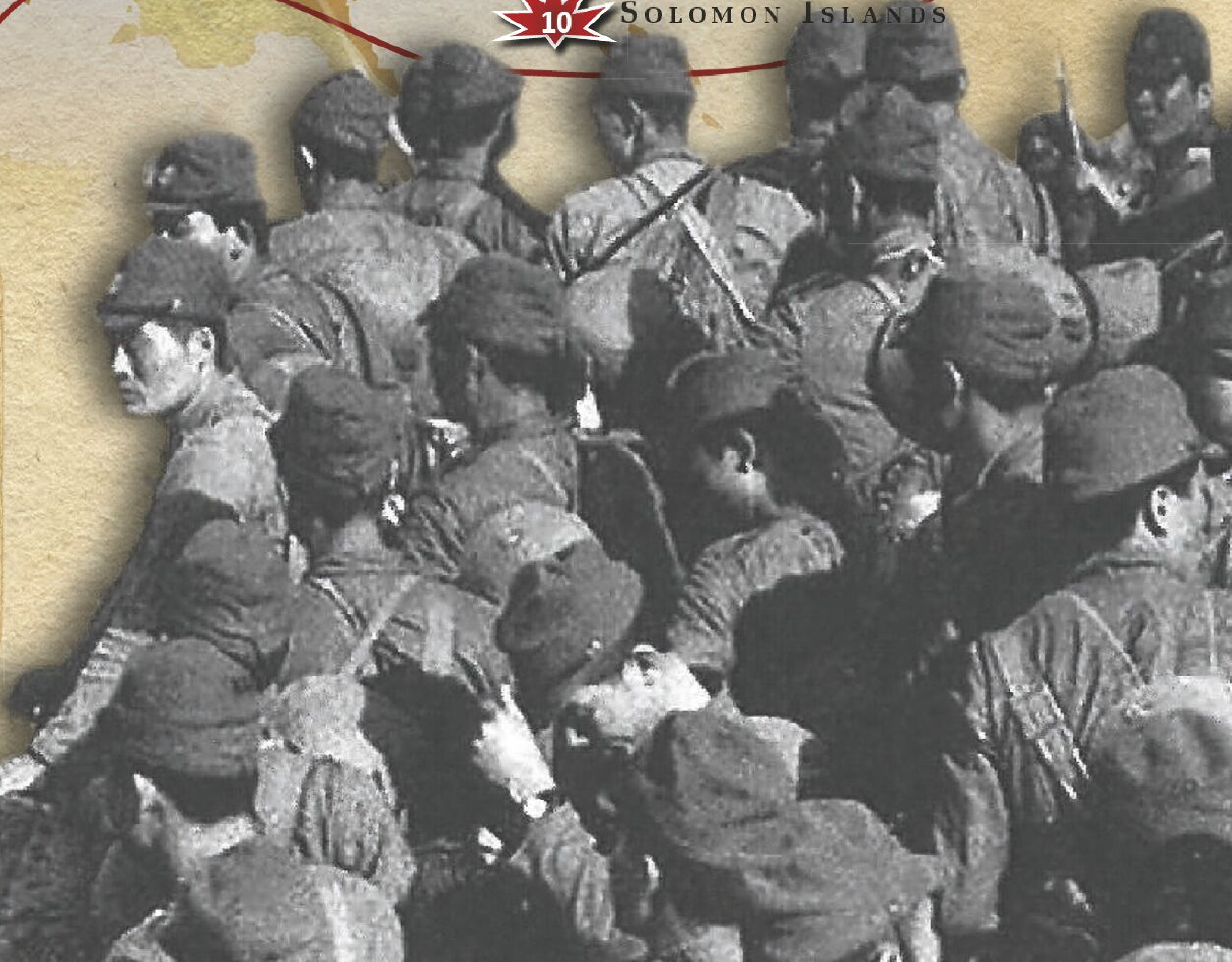
10 23RD JANUARY, 1942: SOLOMON ISLANDS
- Japan cuts supplies to Australia.

11 21ST JUNE, 1942: NEW GUINEA
- The island is strategically important to Japan.



JAPANESE ARMY

Number of soldiers	
1937	**336,000**
1938	**590,400**
1939	**804,400**
1940	**910,000**
1941	**1,032,500**
1942	**1,087,500**



Everywhere the Japanese soldiers appeared, the flag of the armed forces waved.

> “On 1st December, 1941, the attack plan was presented to Hirohito”

action and following up a step he had long hesitated to take: an oil embargo.

The stop of American oil would be a tough blow for Japan. The country was entirely dependent on imported oil and oil from the USA in particular, to keep the army and air force capable of fighting.

But an oil embargo would also be an escalation, which could lead to war, Roosevelt believed. The President waited until 25th July, 1941 before deciding. That day, the US government announced that all Japanese funds in the US would immediately be frozen and an oil embargo had begun.

Moving toward Pearl Harbor

The cessation of oil exports to Japan was supported by Great Britain and the Dutch exile government, which controlled the oil fields in Dutch East India. From their perspective, it was necessary for Japan to conquer Southeast Asia's oil fields and become independent of imported oil.

Knowing that a conquest war would cause the Americans to declare war on Japan, the Japanese leadership secretly began working on a new, daring plan: to disable the USA by hitting the Pacific's fleet hard and fast without warning.

On 24th September, 1941, the Japanese Navy's intelligence service sent a top secret message to their spy in Hawaii, Takeo Yoshikawa. Hawaii's Pearl Harbor was home to the majority of the US's mighty Pacific naval fleet.

The message to agent Yoshikawa told him to make vessel reports with regard to warships and aircraft carriers, noting those at anchor, in the quay and at dock.

While Yoshikawa was secretly monitoring and reporting movements of the giant American warships, diplomatic negotiations with the USA were slowing to a standstill. The Japanese were stubbornly refusing to comply with USA demands to withdraw from China and sever ties with Nazi Germany while still pretending to be committed to finding a diplomatic solution.

> “At 07:55 the first bombs fall over Pearl Harbor's giant warships”.

Meanwhile, the planning of a surprise attack on the US pacific fleet continued at full speed back home in Japan.

Americans taken by surprise

On 1st December, 1941, the plan of attack was presented to Emperor Hirohito, and the 40-year-old monarch approved it and gave his generals their wish.

The six Japanese aircraft carriers *Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu, Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* had already travelled half the way from Japan to Hawaii with hundreds of Japanese bombers on board. Early in the morning of Sunday, 7th December, 1941 – Monday, the 8th Japanese time – the six aircraft carriers with their load of bombers found themselves less than two hours' flight from Hawaii, and at just after 06.00, the first wave of attacks launched.

At 07.55 the first bombs fell upon Pearl Harbor's giant warships and the totally unprepared naval troops. Nearby, other bombers immediately incapacitated 200 US aircraft at nearby airfields. Over the next two hours, hundreds of Japanese aircraft swarmed around the American naval harbour in two devastating waves, while their bombs and torpedoes crashed into American ships.

When the bombing run finished, eight US battleships, three cruisers, and several smaller ships were either sunk or severely damaged, and more than 2,400 Americans lost their lives. In comparison, only 29 Japanese aircraft had been shot from the skies.

Japan expands its empire

While the Americans were trying to get over the shock of the situation, the Japanese acted quickly. Two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese troops invaded Hong Kong, the Gilbert Islands, Malaysia, Thailand and the US Pacific islands of Wake and Guam.

Japan took the first, decisive step on its way to a great Asian Pacific empire, and in the following months, no army could stop the Japanese soldiers from marching across Southeast Asia.

Unfortunately for the Japanese, the damage to Pearl Harbor – despite the many destroyed warships and planes – was manageable for the Americans. Essentially,

In a single stroke, Japan's attack on the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii drew the United States into World War II.

EYEWITNESS

*Commander Mitsuo Fuchida/**Pearl Harbor 1941***

NO RETURN FIRE

“Veering right toward the west coast of the island, we could see that the sky over Pearl Harbor was clear. Presently the harbour itself became visible across the central Oahu plain, a film of morning mist hovering over it. I peered intently through my binoculars at the ships riding peacefully at anchor... It was 07.49 when I ordered my radioman to send the command, 'Attack!... Leading the whole group, Lieutenant Commander Murata's torpedo bombers headed downward to launch their torpedoes, while Lieutenant Commander Itayay's fighters raced forward to sweep enemy fighters from the air... No enemy fighters were in the air, nor were there any gun flashes from the ground.”

all Pearl Harbor aircraft carriers were out of the port during the attack, and the Americans did not lose a single one of those vessels. The US carriers would prove to be the deciding factor in future naval battles.

Furthermore, the Japanese admiral in charge of the attack on Pearl Harbor, despite a myriad of calls from his officers, never performed a third wave of planned attacks. The admiral feared losing a large number of aircraft, and Pearl Harbor's torpedo warehouses, ship docks and fuel stores survived undamaged from the attack.

The Americans could quickly rebuild the base, and soon the American war machine would run with a effective power that could match the Japanese.

Torpedo bombers launching in the morning on 7th December, 1941 from the Japanese aircraft carrier Akagi and headed for Pearl Harbor, where the US Pacific fleet was anchored.

Shiro Ishii

DEATH DOCTOR TESTED WEAPONS ON PEOPLE

Researchers from the infamous Unit 731 exposed captured Chinese to deadly diseases, extreme cold and painful operations without anaesthesia. Doctor Shiro Ishii was behind the gruesome experiments which led to effective biological weapons.

Ishii: hero or villain?

THE DOCTOR FROM HELL

- 👎 Ordered torturous experiments on prisoners in Unit 731.
- 👎 Was marked by extreme cynicism and no empathy for others' pain and misfortune.
- 👎 Appeared selfish and self-promoting.

Japanese Unit 731 conducted medical experiments on Chinese prisoners without anaesthetising them first.

Manchuria 1936

THE STAGE IS SET

Ping Fan
CHINA

Japanese leaders plan to create an Empire in the Far East and in 1931, initiate conquests with the invasion of Manchuria. At the same time, the Empire's scientists eagerly develop new weapons that are being tested against civilians and prisoners of war. Mercilessly, Doctor Shiro Ishii conducts deathly experiments.

As always building dust wafted in the air over the building site in Ping Fan on an autumn day in 1936. Shiro Ishii proudly considered his giant project to make Japan a leader in biological and chemical warfare. From the conference room, the 44-year-old physician and microbiologist had a panoramic view of the six-square-kilometre facility where thousands of Chinese workers toiled all day long in the gravel and building dust.

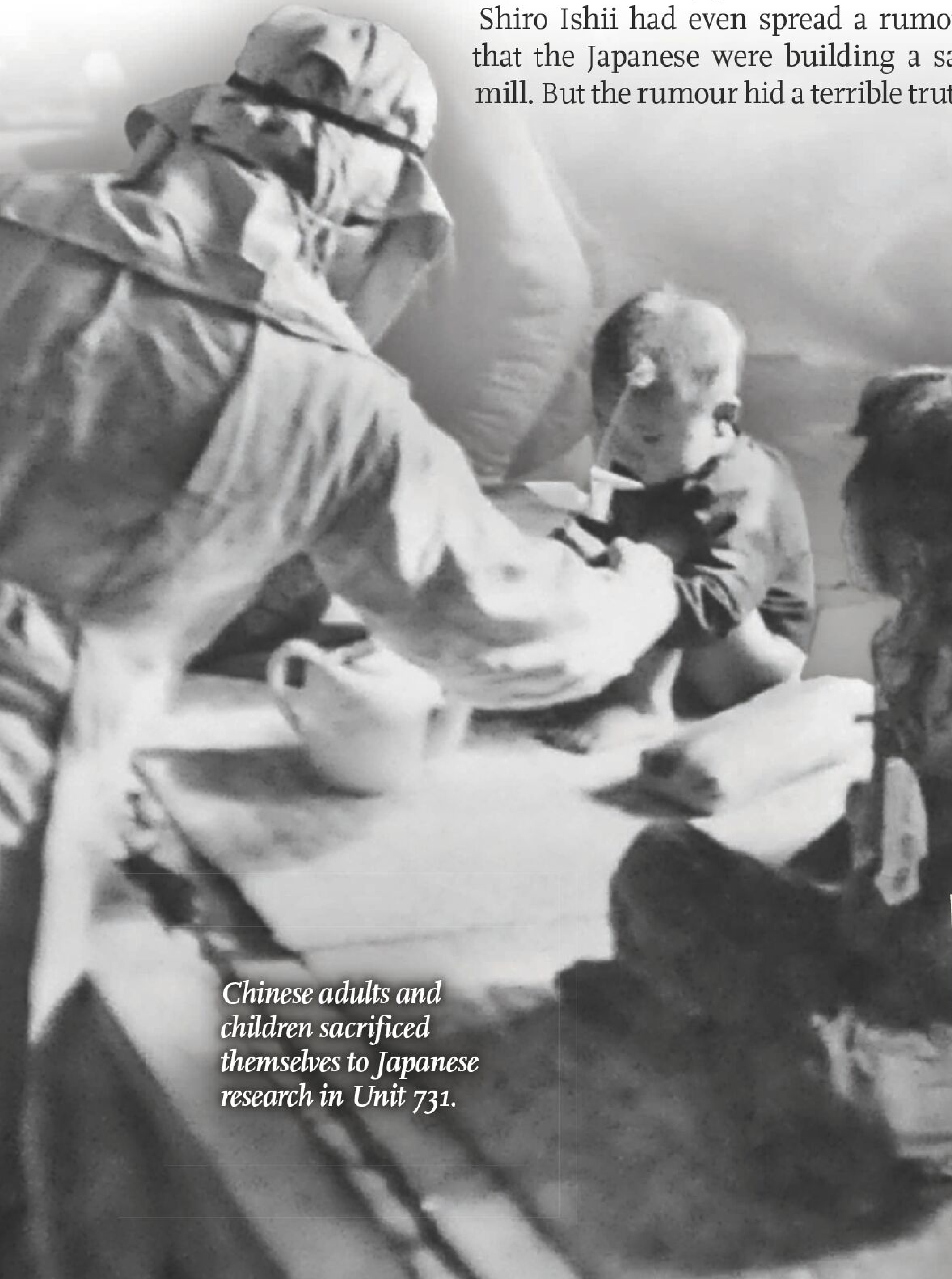
Some months previously, the Empire's troops had forcibly removed Chinese peasants from the area in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, and now occupying forces bullied local Chinese. Day by day the buildings grew, but the purpose of the construction project in the Ping Fan desert was top secret. "High walls were constructed with a barbed wire fence at the top. It was obvious that this camp had to be isolated from the outside world", noted a Japanese worker.

Shiro Ishii had even spread a rumour that the Japanese were building a saw mill. But the rumour hid a terrible truth. Although the building contained harmless structures such as greenhouses and Shinto temples, Ping Fan also included secret tunnels, prison cells, laboratories and underground testing areas from which screams soon resonated through the air. The plant, which Ishii looked out over in autumn 1936, was anything but a saw mill. The complex was a death factory.

ISHII WOULD WIN WAR WITH NEW WEAPONS

When Shiro Ishii used to harp on about anatomy and microbiology at the medical school in Kyoto in the 1910s, he had already shown special characteristics. Several teachers believed that Ishii was a potential genius. However, his fellow students perceived Ishii as harsh, nasty and arrogant.

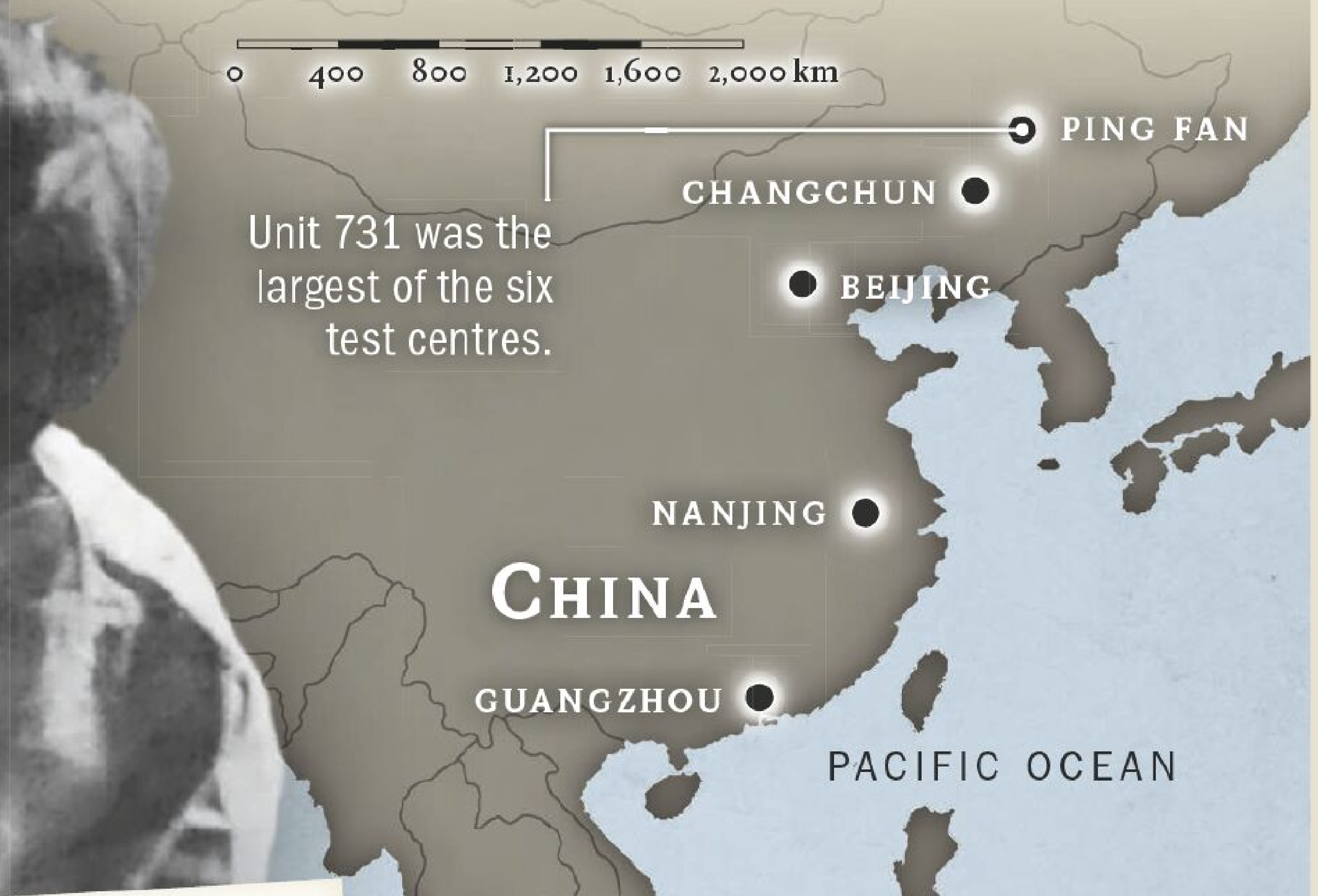
Like many young Japanese in the first decades of the 1900s, the medical students demonstrated an almost fanatical loyalty to both motherland and emperor, and Ishii was determined to combine medicine with a career in the military. He specialised in microbiology and studied bacteria and viruses. Ishii joined the army too, rising rapidly through the ranks.



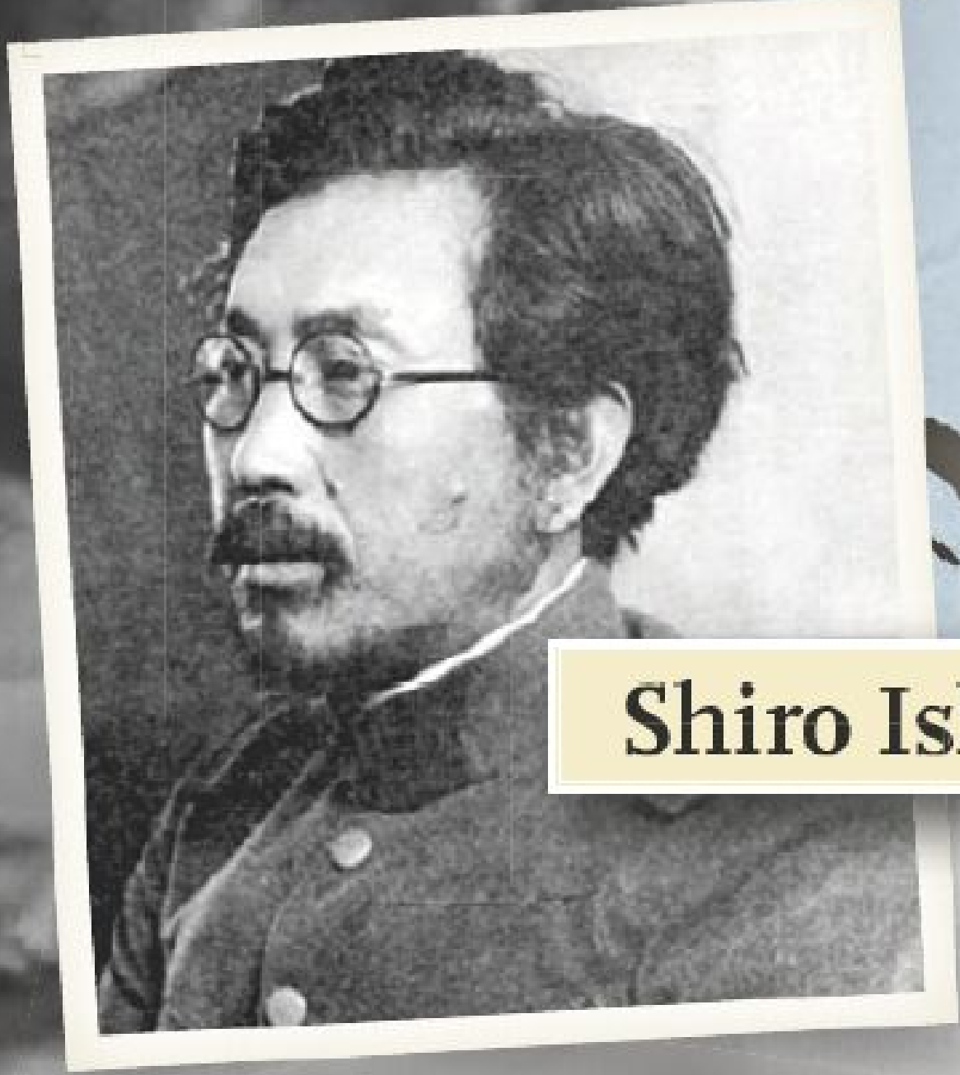
Chinese adults and children sacrificed themselves to Japanese research in Unit 731.

Unit 731 was the largest

Experimental Centre in Ping Fan. Unit 731 – had a total of five satellite units: four in China and one in Singapore. Their work was coordinated through Unit 731.



Unit 731 was the largest of the six test centres.



Shiro Ishii

The head of Unit 731 – Shiro Ishii – had thousands of human lives on his conscience.

Like the Unit 731's researchers, Japanese soldiers were protected with gas masks in the field.

Japanese gas masks had a long tube that went down to a purification filter.

"Ishii is ambitious and likes to do great things. In a way he is a braggart. He is very anxious to rise through the ranks by performing meritorious acts", explained one of his colleagues.

Already by 1930, ultra nationalist Ishii had been decorated with a major star, and was a military success in Tokyo:

"Ishii's face was known to the staff at headquarters and he stressed the importance of bacteriological warfare", officer Endo Saburo wrote in his diary.

Ishii believed that the Japanese could kill far more enemy soldiers and civilians by poisoning water or throwing bacterial bombs than by sending thousands of troops armed with rifles and bayonets.

Ishii got money for research and quickly developed a special filter that soldiers could use to purify drinking water for pathogens. However, filters and vaccines that protected the empire's troops were not enough for the ambitious doctor. Ishii ached for research that would lead to the development of new weapons:

"There are two types of research in bacteriological warfare, A and B. A is the attack research and B is defensive research. Vaccine research belongs to the B-type and can be made in Japan. A-type, on the other hand, can only be carried out abroad".

"Unit Ishii"
the experimental complex in Ping Fan was named after the chief, Shiro Ishii. The name stayed for five years, until in 1941 it was changed to "Unit 731".

Ishii felt trapped in desolate Manchuria in northern China, which had come under Japanese control in 1931-32. In this area, researchers could carry out their experiments without the prying eyes of the outside world. In the summer of 1932, the microbiologist wrote a letter to top executives in Tokyo: "Thanks to your great help we have already come a long way in our bacterial research. It's time to start experiments".

Prisoners were cut up alive

By the autumn of 1932 and probably until 1936, Ishii and a team of 300 employees had already experimented with bacteria on Chinese prisoners who were brought to a Japanese camp at Beiyinhe in Manchuria. But it wasn't until the end of August 1936 that Ishii had funds to set up his gigantic death factory in Ping Fan: Unit 731.

Ishii stood in the plant's conference room considering how the complex would grow and grow. The workers had just finished building the prison cells as covered trucks and trains rolled in with more Chinese prisoners. In a tasteless display of humour the prisoners were called Maruta – "pieces of wood" – in reference to Ishii's cover story describing the Ping Fan complex as a simple saw mill. The Japanese considered themselves as a superior race and the Chinese as simple wood that could be broken, cut and burned.

"New pieces of wood", shouted the soldiers, when the doors opened under cover of darkness. The prisoners were led into the cold prison cells and chained by their feet.

Ping Fan's complex structure meant that the guards could drag the prisoners through secret underground tunnels. On the way, Chinese workers could not see or hear the prisoners when they were led from the cells to experiment rooms. At the same time, Ishii and the other doctors made the unit's state of the art testing facilities and laboratories ready. Rows of containers with plague, cholera, tuberculosis and typhus bacteria were prepared for injection into the victims. At other times, doctors saved bacteria in food and drink – cakes, vegetables, fruit, tea, milk and beer – to find the foods that best transmitted diseases to humans.

After hours or days, the victims were sick and showed obvious signs of disease. For Ishii and his colleagues the symptoms were a signal to herd the prisoners into dissection rooms where scalpels and saws were lined up next to the couches. Sometimes doctors' assistants had the dubious honour of initiating the dissection. One of the assistants was just a teenager when he cut his first plague-infected prisoner: "The guy knew it was over for him, so he did not fight, as they led him into the room and tied him quickly. But when I grabbed the scalpel, he began to scream. I cut him from the chest to the abdomen, and he screamed terribly, his face contorted in pain. He made an indescribable sound, he screamed so vilely. But eventually he stopped. This work was everyday life for surgeons, but it really made an impression on me because it was my first time", the assistant explained after the war.

Over 10,000

Chinese workers toiled to build the experimental complex in Ping Fan between 1936 and 1938. Later sub-units were created in other parts of China.

Other times the Japanese didn't tie the prisoners down, they let four strong men hold the victims by their arms and legs until the pain became so much that the victim fainted. Then the surgeons' continued their more thorough work:

"Organs were removed, conditions such as colour and weight were compared to healthy conditions and the organs were preserved", recounted an anonymous young medical student who, in December 1937, became part of Unit 731's education section where Ishii taught students personally.

The young medical student came close to the experiments because besides his study he had other tasks like carrying buckets full of blood and internal organs:

"I preserved samples from human laboratories in formalin. Some included the heads, arms, legs and internal organs, while others were whole bodies. A large number of glass containers were set up in series and even contained samples from children and babies. When I first walked into the room, I was sick and could not eat for days after".

PLANES DROPPED BACTERIAL BOMBS

The victims were dissected alive, with no anaesthetic because Ishii and his colleagues believed that the body's response to bacteria could best be observed on living beings.

Doctors exhibited the same cynicism when they forced the prisoners into Unit 731's pressure chamber. The Japanese slowly increased the pressure until the victims collapsed in convulsions and eventually died. While this was happening, doctors read gauges and deduced how much pressure people with different body sizes could tolerate – knowledge that was useful to the imperial army pilots.

Death was also painful for subjects who Ishii selected for tests of frostbite. In summer, the tests were carried out in Ping Fan's cold rooms and in the winter, outdoors at temperatures down to -20 degrees.

"Maturas were dragged out in freezing weather in the evening, at 11 o'clock, and forced to put their bare hands into a barrel of cold water. Then they had to put their hands up and stand with their hands in the frosty air for a long time", Lieutenant Colonel Nishi Toshihide explained.

After several hours, Japanese wearing padded coats went up to the prisoners and struck a truncheon against each of the Chinese's frozen arms. When a hollow sound was heard, the guards led the unfortunate subjects inside and lowered the victims' arms in water at different temperatures. This would show whether the method could prevent frostbite. Victims that avoided frost damage the first time, had the experiment repeated until frostbite was found. Afterwards, prisoners with gangrene were kept in the cells until it was time for their dissection. And if Unit 731 needed more room for experiments, guards stowed selected subjects into a truck and drove two hours north to Anda – a desert region well suited to Japan's so-called "air experiments". Men from Unit 731's Special Forces escorted the victims onto a barren piece of land where the prisoners were tied together. The Japanese ran to safety a few hundred metres away, while the planes from Ping Fan's air base approached.

From a low altitude, the planes dropped Ishii's customised bacterial bombs down over the plain where the subjects were bound. The bombs could be iron, ceramic and glass and contained bacteria from plague fleas to anthrax. After a while, Japanese dressed in rubber boots, protective clothing, gas

Police force led the hunt for test subjects

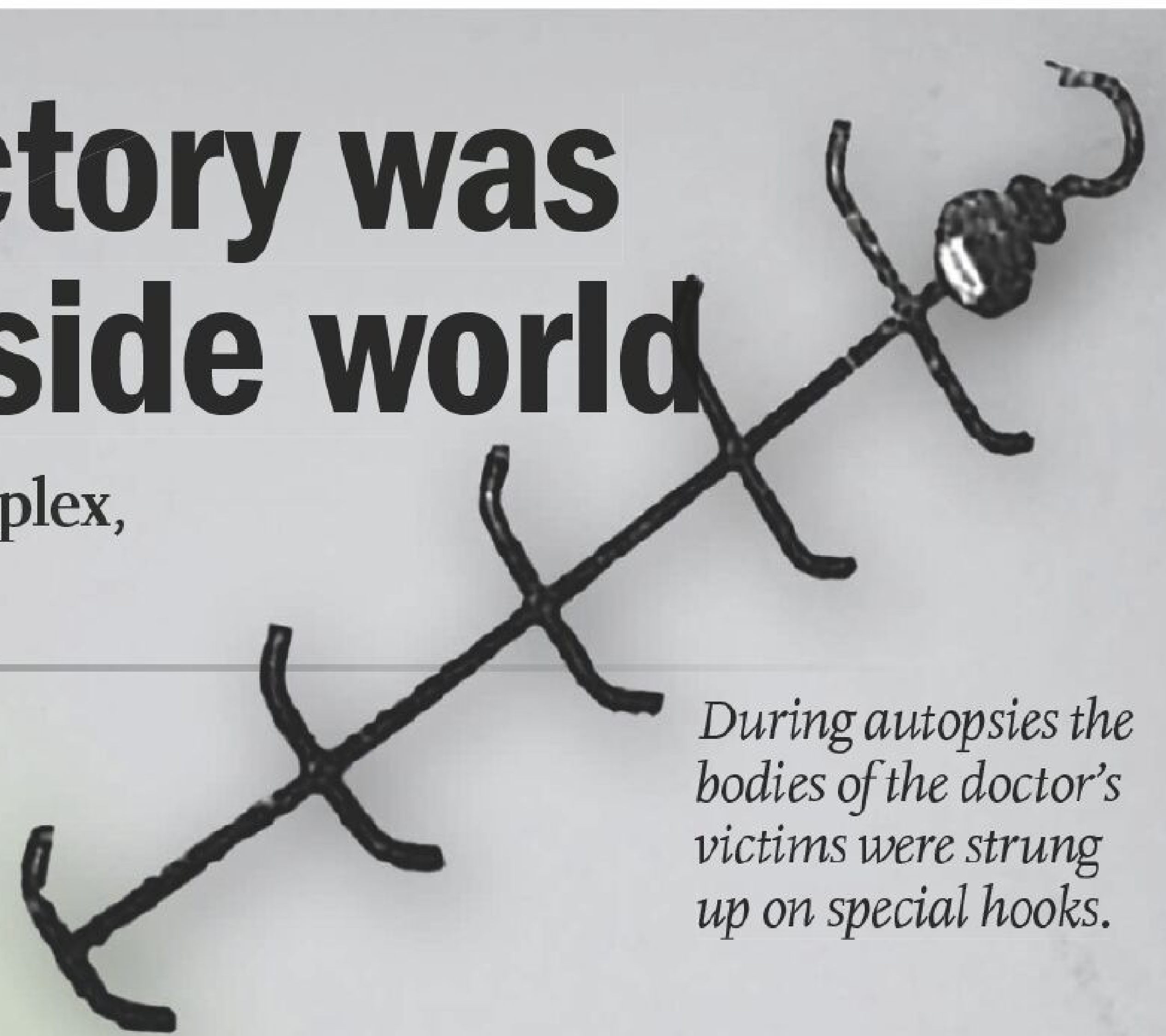
The Imperial military police Kempeitai, sourced suitable sacrifices for Shiro Ishii's experiments with biological weapons in Ping Fan.

Japanese military police (Kempeitai) could arrest any opponent of the Empire's occupying forces and sweep Manchuria for everybody from resistance fighters to opium smokers. Interrogation was marked by torture and often forced a confession. Prisoners in Harbin were immediately put on trains or trucks bound for the complex in Ping Fan.

In Unit 731's headquarters, physicians checked the prisoners and allocated them to various experiments. At particular times, Ishii and his colleagues sought specific types of subject for their experiments – for example, a particular sex, a particular age or particular body type. Kempeitai selected the unfortunate victims and accused them of random offences.

The secret death factory was hidden from the outside world

A five-metre-high brick wall protected Unit 731's complex, so human experiments were kept secret.



During autopsies the bodies of the doctor's victims were strung up on special hooks.

TEST COMPLEX

Within a 6 km^2 area the Japanese created a complex of laboratories, prisons and experimental facilities for biological experiments.

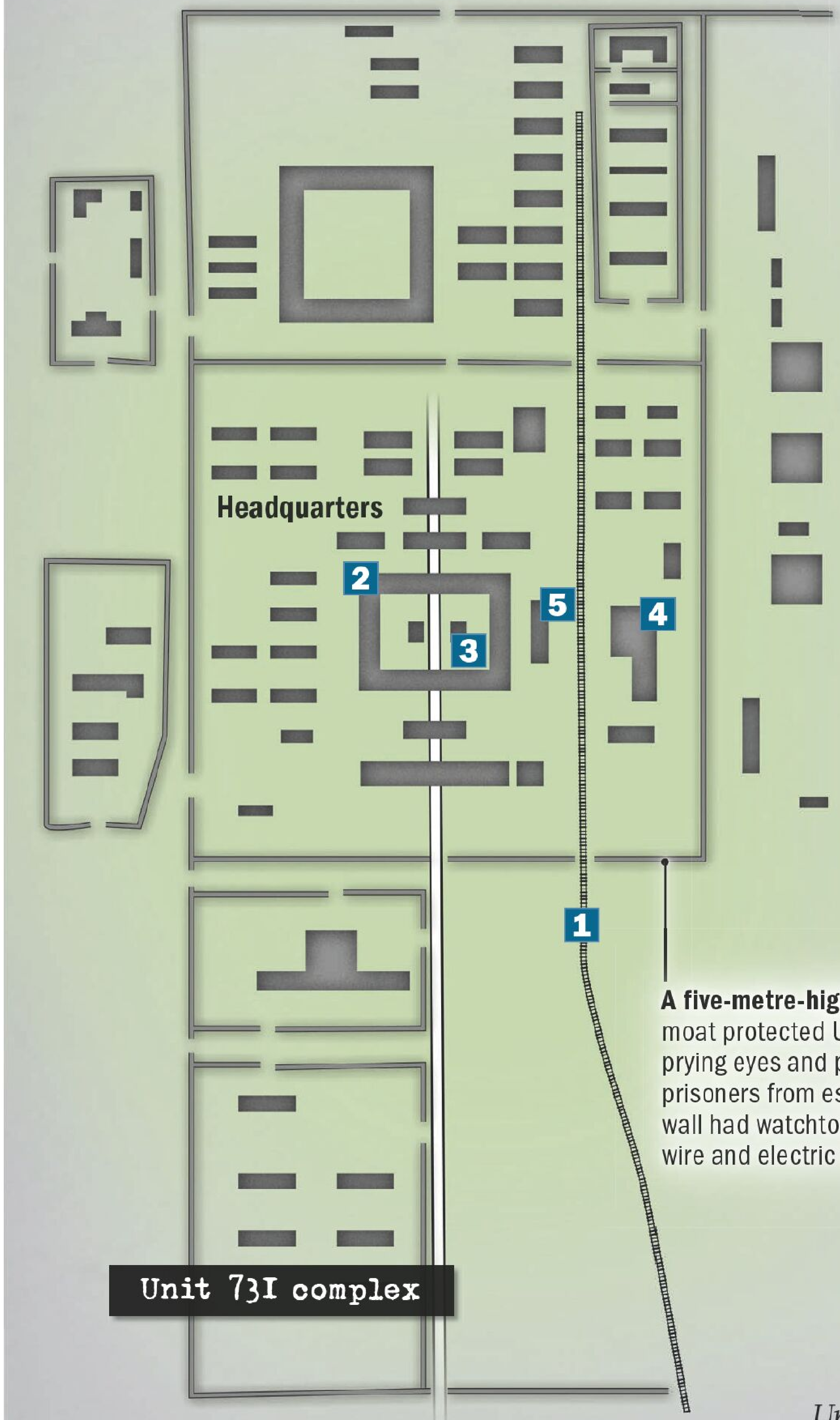
1 The railway track went from the city of Harbin and led directly into the complex. Often victims arrived in the middle of the night so as not to attract attention.

2 The administration building was the plant's biggest construction. The concrete structure was so strong that the Japanese could not blow the building apart in August 1945 – traces of Unit 731 have since been discovered.

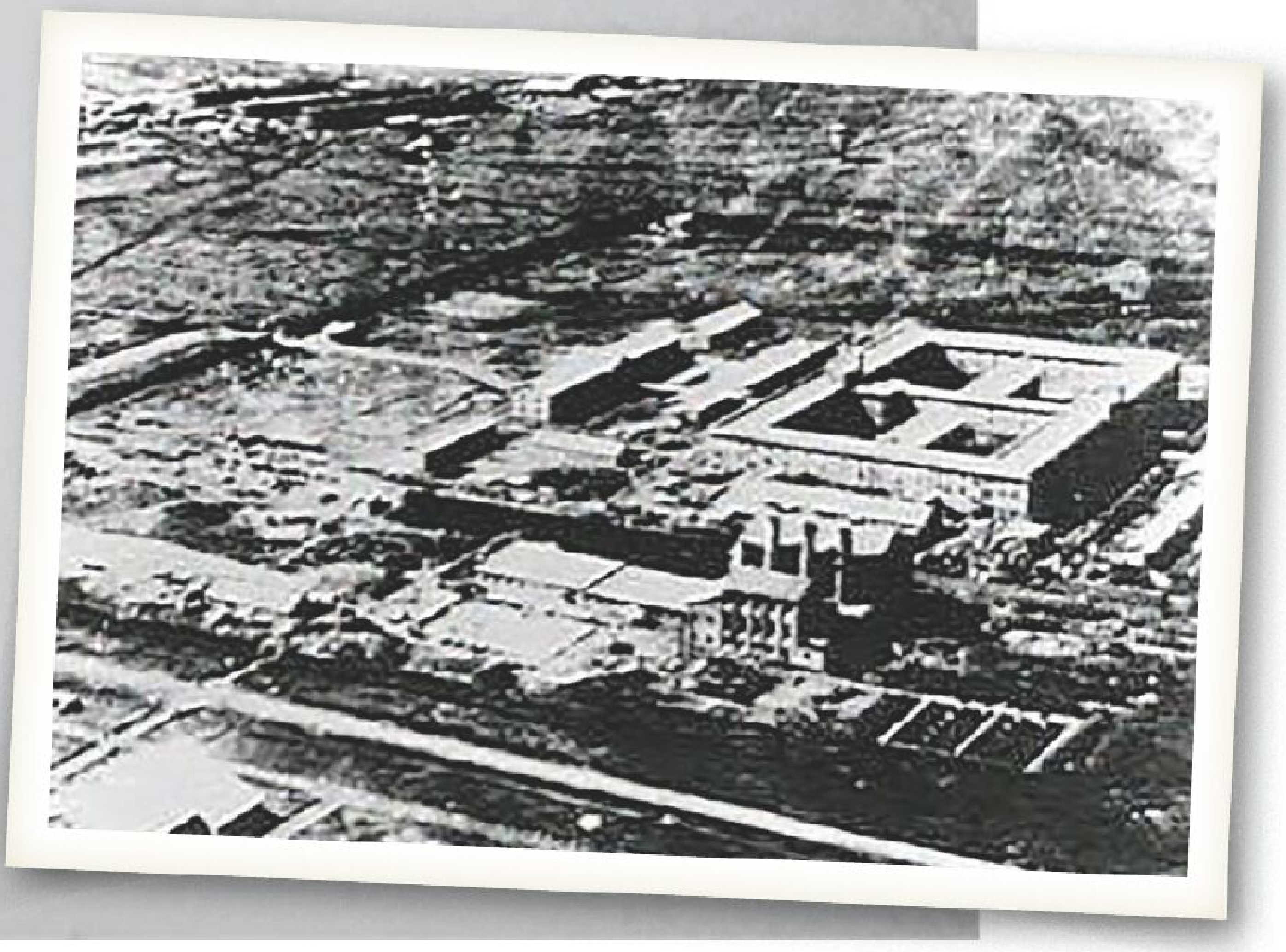
3 The prison's two buildings in the administration house's square yard could accommodate up to 500 men, women and children to be included in the trials.

4 The crematoria burned people who had died during various medical experiments.

5 The power plant's four boilers provided energy. The boilers had a capacity of one ton of fuel each.



A five-metre-high wall with a moat protected Unit 731 from prying eyes and prevented prisoners from escaping. The wall had watchtowers, barbed wire and electric fences.



Unit 731's complex filled an area of six square kilometres.

masks and long rubber gloves returned to fetch the subjects. Protecting private personnel had high priority for Ishii: "Medical staff cannot get sick no matter what... I have to live, you must survive for Japan's sake", the lead scientist stated.

The prisoners were brought home to Ping Fan base and tested for diseases, so doctors could assess which of the bombs worked best. The experiments with plague bombs were unsuccessful, but anthrax bombs proved to be very different:

"Some of the subjects were infected with anthrax and died, I learned later", a Japanese anthrax expert expressed with professional pride.

Also, more common bombs were dropped on test subjects in Anda, so researchers could determine when shrapnel did the most damage. Pilots also experimented with spraying bacteria and gas out from the plane's wing tips.

Not everything went as planned in Anda, as Ishii and his driver Koshi Sadao experienced on one occasion. 40 prisoners

Shiro Ishii and his aides used protective equipment during tests.

were bound on the plain waiting for the death machines from Ping Fan, when one of the Chinese managed to escape. Quickly, the prisoner also freed his countrymen, and soon "almost all 40 were scattered throughout the area, but there was nowhere to flee", recounted Sadao.

"There was nothing else to do but to jump into the truck and run them over. Sometimes I got one under the vehicle; sometimes I felt one being crushed under the footboard. In the end, all 40 were killed", the driver remembered.

This failure did not dampen Ishii's enthusiasm for experiments in Anda and soon he was ready to go all out and use bacterial weapons in practice.

FIELD TESTS WERE PERFORMED

In May 1940, Ishii boarded a heavily guarded train at the station in Ping Fan. The doctor's people had spent the whole day loading it with a toxic cargo of 70 kilograms of typhus bacteria, 50 kg of cholera and 5 kg of plague-infected fleas into the wagons. Ahead of them, the first major field test of Japan's bacteriological weapons awaited, with the Chinese city of Ningbo chosen as the test area.

After Ishii and his crew had surveyed the terrain in Ningbo for a few months, the death doctor ordered his men to contaminate the area's water basins, ponds and wells with pathogenic bacteria. When autumn came, Unit 731's crews also made flights that triggered containers with contaminated wheat plague over the city.

"It looked like dense smoke, billowing behind the plane", American missionary Archie Crouch wrote in his diary.

But the next day the missionary heard that the smoke that emerged was huge quantities of grain falling through the air. The inhabitants immediately set upon the wheat and began to feed the chickens. Just a few days later "the first symptoms of bubonic plague appeared among the people who lived in the city centre", the American explained.

"We heard that 20 people in the city centre were seriously ill", wrote Crouch on 3rd November. A few days later "another 16 were dead". Although local authorities tried to stop the infection, by December large parts of the city were overtaken by plague. Ishii's attack resulted with at least 1,000 people in Ningbo sick of typhus, cholera or plague, and more than 500 dead. The Japanese's own response to the

1894-1986

NAME **MASAJI KITANO**

TITLE HEAD OF UNIT 731

New Head continued death trials

Shiro Ishii left Ping Fan in late summer 1942, leaving the management of Unit 731 to doctor and microbiologist Masaji Kitano. Kitano was more liked by the staff because he seemed friendlier than his predecessor. The new boss was equally cynical about the treatment of prisoners as Ishii. Experiments continued during Kitano's time and like other officers in Unit 731 he was not punished after the war. Kitano later managed a pharmaceutical company.

- **Took his medical exams in 1922.**
- **Briefly in a prison camp after the war.**

attack is unknown, but Ishii seemed ready for more. Over the next year, executioners experimented with multiple field trials – not least in Nanjing in 1942, when Ishii's people scattered large quantities of spotted fever and cholera bacteria in wells and swamps.

The Japanese death doctor also gave buns to Nanjing prisoners of war, who were later released, happy to return to their families without a clue that Ishii had filled the buns with typhus bacteria. The doctor used the same strategy when his people handed out chocolate to local children. Excited children ran home to their families and shared the sweets out – they didn't notice the bitter taste of anthrax.

DEATH DOCTOR ESCAPED PUNISHMENT

In 1942, Masaji Kitano took over daily management at Unit 731, while Ishii took control of a medical unit in Nanjing. The former chief continued to visit Ping Fan frequently. The death factory tests carried on until 1945 when Ishii decided to destroy all evidence of the experiments.

The bodies of the subjects had been continuously burned in Ping Fan's crematoria, but on the evening of 13th August, 1945 the last prisoners were given syringes filled with cyanide. At the same time, the Japanese dragged laboratory equipment and glass containers with samples into trucks, which were driven to the Songhua River and the evidence dumped. Next day, for the last time, the smoke from the crematoria increased, in order to rid all evidence once and for all.

"After we had burned the bodies, our job was to destroy the prison cells. We chiselled large holes in the wall and blasting experts planted dynamite. But the walls would not blow up. The buildings were well-built. Even the windows were difficult to break", a Unit 731 employee said after the war.

Therefore, some buildings were still standing when the last train with over 20 carriages rolled away from the ruins. Moving away from Manchuria, Ishii went through the compartments with a large candle and gave a clear message to staff from Unit 731:

"I'm sending you home. If any of you reveal the secret of Unit 731, I will personally find you, even if I have to separate the root from the grass to do so", said the death doctor to one of the unit's nurses.

However, Shiro Ishii never received a punishment. Although the Allies learned of the experiments in Ping Fan, Americans failed to prosecute the chief doctor and his cronies. Japanese researchers escaped punishment by passing on knowledge and presenting the results of human trials for US scientists to use. This deal was highly controversial, even though Edwin Hill – a researcher from the United States – described the information as "absolutely priceless". Hill even declared that "the information was obtained fairly cheaply". The statement stood in stark contrast to the one from the contrite Japanese, who described the experiments in Unit 731 as a crime against humanity.

Shiro Ishii's life and work after WWII is something of an enigma. Historians and some eyewitnesses have claimed that the Japanese microbiologist counselled Americans on the use of biological weapons until his death. Ishii died of throat cancer in 1959. The 67-year-old Japanese left a diary, but not a single line mentions the death physician's extensive crimes in Manchuria. ■

Human tests cost thousands of lives

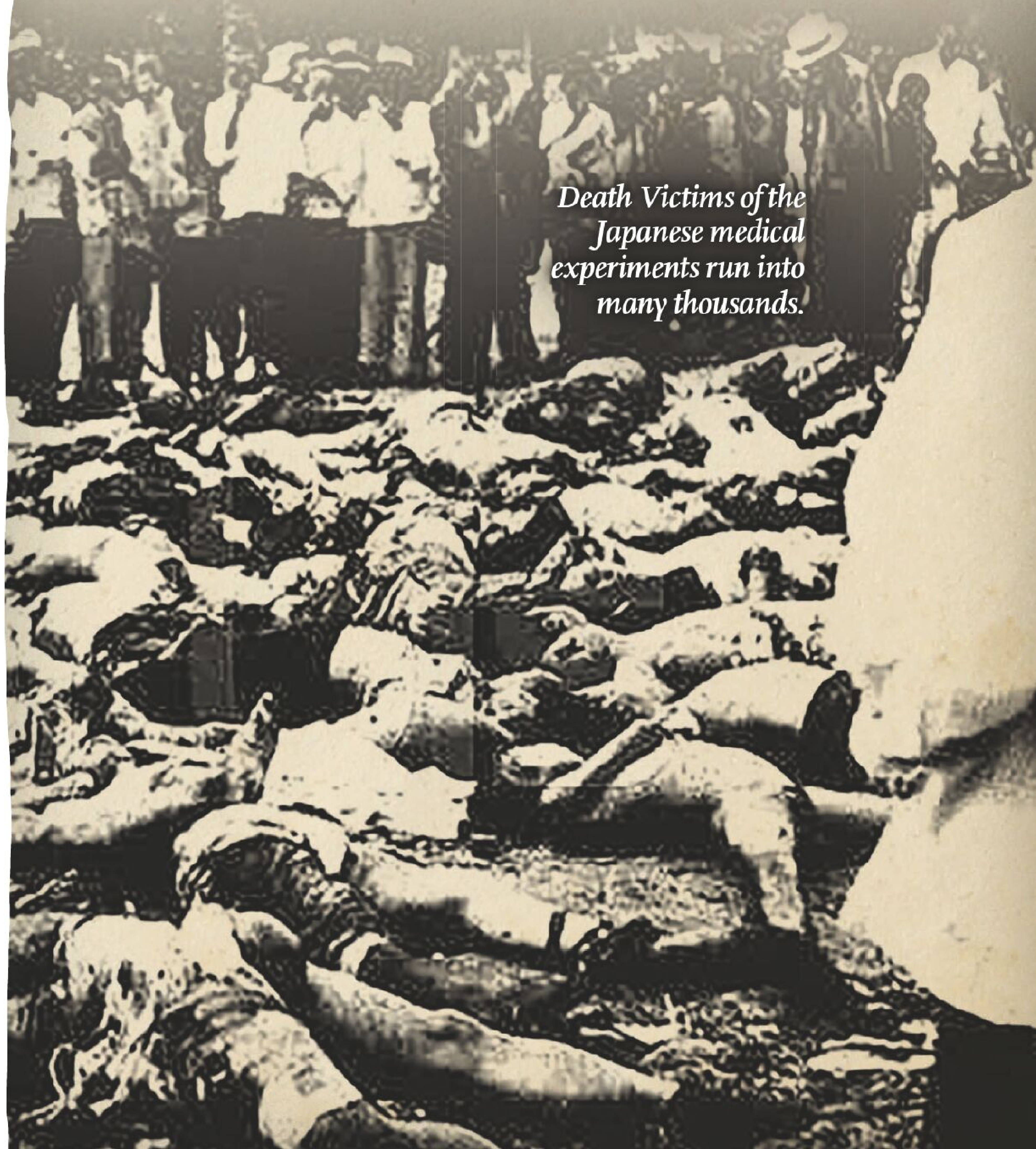
The exact number of dead during Japan's biological experiments is unknown, but the death toll is believed to run into hundreds of thousands.

The Japanese's destruction of experimental buildings and evidence of experiments in Unit 731 and satellite departments meant that the exact number killed during Shiro Ishii's human trials will never be known. But historians have given careful assessments of the number of deaths.

At least **3,000** died in Ping Fan.
At least **10,000** died in all test centres
More than **300,000** died in all field trials

Many people died immediately after Shiro Ishii's field trials with the spread of bacteria, but experiments have probably also caused recent outbreaks. Rumour was that in August 1945, the Japanese released the plague-infected rats and fleas into Ping Fan area.

Between **20,000** and **30,000** died of plague 1945-48.



Death Victims of the Japanese medical experiments run into many thousands.

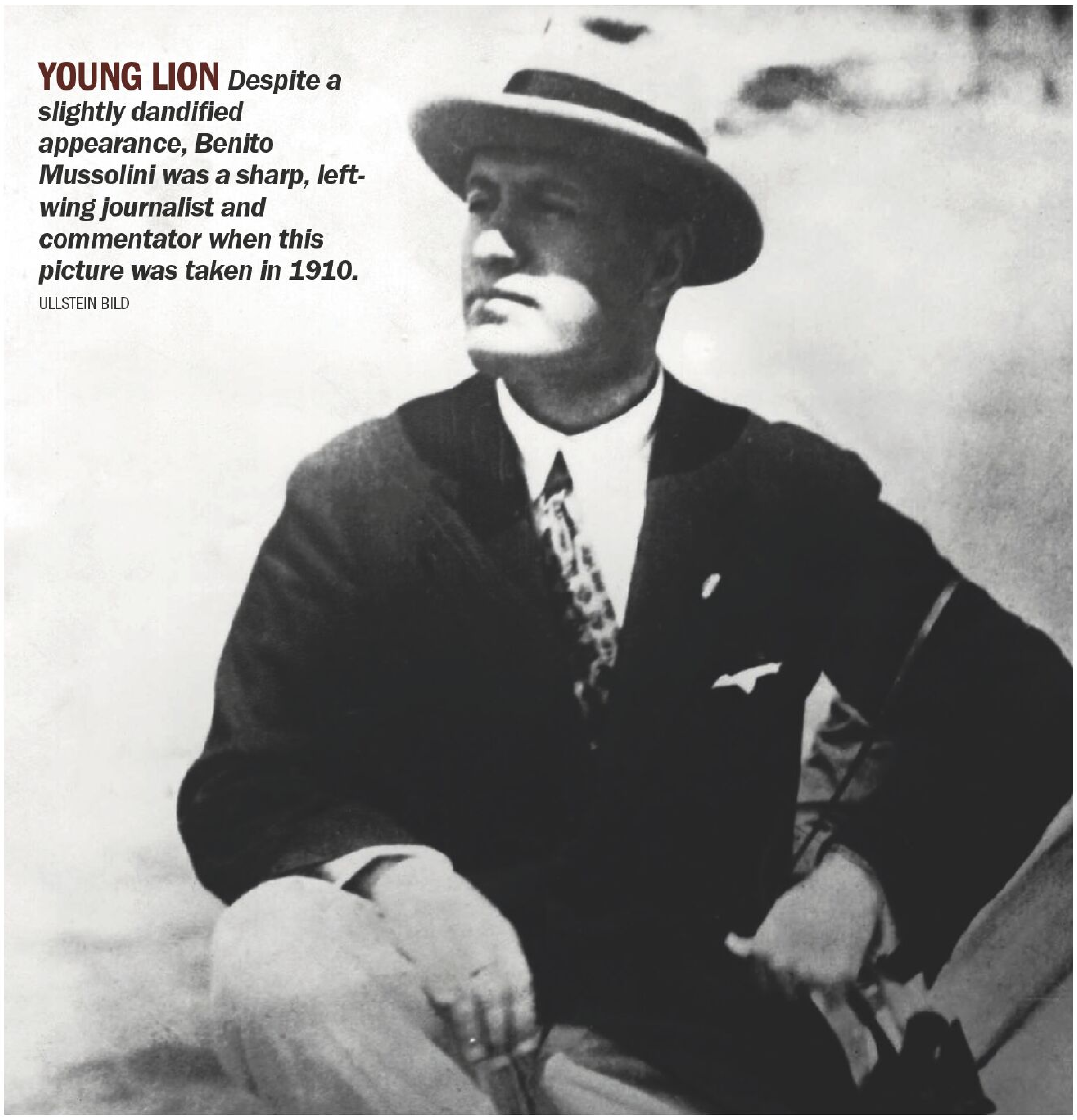
MUSSO wanted to recreate the Roman Empire

TIRADE *Mussolini's rhetoric was not particularly sophisticated, but he used strong, image-rich language and had an ability to mesmerise his audience.*

POLFOTO/TOPFOTO

LINI

Il Duce wanted to be the emperor of a new Roman empire. The burningly ambitious and charismatic little man seduced not only woman after woman, he also seduced most of his people and achieved almost god-like status. He managed to conquer Abyssinia and gain control over Libya, but during World War II he lost his grip on reality and ended up Italy's most hated and hunted man.



YOUNG LION *Despite a slightly dandified appearance, Benito Mussolini was a sharp, left-wing journalist and commentator when this picture was taken in 1910.*

ULLSTEIN BILD

BY STINE OVERBYE

The shift from enthusiastic roaring to devout silence happens in a split second. When the doors to the balcony of Palazzo Venezia's first floor open at 22:30 on 9 May, 1936, and a middle-aged man in a black shirt and gray uniform steps out, a roaring cheer breaks out from about a quarter of a million voices in the warm spring evening. But when the man lifts his right hand, the human sea is silenced as if by magic. Hundreds of thousands of pairs of eyes look expectantly at the figure, who juts out his lower jaw and puts his hands on his hips. And when, with a powerful voice, he proclaims that the Italian army has conquered Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), a gasp escapes the crowd.

> **“Italy needs a leader. A man who knows and loves his people, and who can control and subdue them by force, if necessary.”**
>
> *Benito Mussolini*
> *1919*

“Italy has its empire now. A fascist empire, a peaceful empire, a civilisation and an empire of humanity,” he proclaims and stares with piercing eyes at his jubilant people. “Will you show yourselves worthy of it?” he asks and receives a deafening “YES” in response. Then the crowd breaks out into an ecstatic tribute: “Duce! Duce! Duce!”

The man on the balcony is omnipotent in the eyes of the Italians. It is said that he stopped the lava flow from a volcano by sheer will alone, and that he is more God than man. With the victory over Abyssinia he grows, if possible, even more prestigious – now he appears to be the rightful heir to the Roman Emperor Augustus, to whom he likes to be compared.

In 14 years, he has made Italy a well-oiled dictatorship, and in this stellar moment he is founder of the new “empire”. Yet he will end up being spat, trampled and urinated on. The people will cheer as he hangs.

Despised in all Italy

Benito Mussolini came from a simple family from the village of Predappio in northern Italy. His mother was a teacher, his father a blacksmith. He followed in his mother's footsteps and, for a while, earned a living as a schoolteacher. Like his father, he was an ardent socialist, and his talent for speaking and writing meant he rose quickly through the ranks of the Partito Socialista Italiano, where he represented the Left. In 1912, at 29 years-old, he was appointed editor of the party newspaper, *Avanti* – the most important socialist newspaper in the country.

Politically, Mussolini made quite an effort to appear as a man of the working class, without major funding and shabbily dressed, with a tattered old hat on his head. But at Milan's fashionable cafes and restaurants, he wore a suit and bowler hat, and quickly gained a reputation for never saying no to a drink or a cup of coffee when others were paying. And he was not a very sociable, he muttered through clenched teeth, stared straight ahead with a dark look and exploded in a rage if anyone dared disagree with him.

And many did. In October 1913, he wrote to a friend: “I work like a madman, but am attacked from all sides; by priests, syndicalists, everyone”. Thanks to his penchant for controversy, his own words caused him to become “the most hated man in Italy”.

Thrown out of the Socialist Party

When World War I broke out in 1914, Mussolini campaigned fiercely against Italy's participation in the war. He maintained, along with the majority in his party, that it should remain neutral. “The proletariat must not be part of an attacking and conquering war, because afterwards he will be just as poor and exploited as before,” he argued in his paper in August 1914.

A few months later he changed his opinion. In October 1914, he asked rhetorically in *Avanti*: “We have the privilege of living in the world's most tragic hour. Do we wish – as human beings and socialists – to be passive spectators to this drama? Or do we want to be leading players?” Mussolini gave the answer himself: Italy should join in the war against the imperial realm of Germany and Austria-Hungary to give world revolution a push.

Mussolini was now past the point of no return. He had defied the socialist party's policy of neutrality and,

MUSSOLINI'S WOMEN

In 1910, Mussolini moved in with a farmer's daughter in her early 20s **RACHELE GUIDI**, whom he then married in 1915. In the meantime, he went through several mistresses. As the later first lady, Rachele was the symbol of the fascist mother. She accepted Mussolini's affairs in silence, bore him two daughters and three sons and remained loyal to the last. She was lucky not to have been with her husband when he was captured and killed. After the war, Rachele was detained briefly, but was then released. Later she ran a restaurant. Rachele died in 1979.

ULLSTEIN BILD

therefore, had to resign from the post of chief editor. A month later, he was also kicked out of the party.

In May 1915 Italy entered the war, and Mussolini volunteered for active service at the front, where he was slightly injured in February 1917 by metal splinters from an exploding mortar grenade. Far and wide he talked about how he had suffered for his country – and to absolutely no avail. After the war, Italy was deprived of the fruits of victory and did not make the expected territorial gains in Asia Minor.

Fascism propagates

In the political turmoil after the war, Mussolini was not slow to place the blame for failure on the government – and in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, the newspaper, he had founded before the war, he had unlimited column space to vent his anger at the established system and to demand a strong man at the helm.

"Italy needs a leader. A man who – when it is needed – has the artist's sensitive spirit and the warrior's strong hand. A man who knows and loves his people, and who can control and subdue it by force if necessary," he declared – though without mentioning the name of a suitable candidate.

After the war, a number of interest groups for war veterans who had returned home to unemployment and lean times were formed throughout Italy. One such groups formed in Milan with Mussolini at its centre.

In March 1919, he called a meeting to form "an anti-party that would face up to two dangers: right-wing reactionaries and leftist destructiveness". A motley crowd of about 300 showed up for the meeting, which resulted in the founding of the fascist movement. The word fascist referred to the ancient Roman power symbol: *fasces,* a bundle of rods, with an axe emerging from its top, symbolising strength through community.

Exactly what the new ideology was about, was difficult to figure out. At the dinner table Mussolini's eldest daughter, 9 year-old Edda tried to question her father closely. "What is fascism?" she asked. "Keep quiet and eat," came the reply.

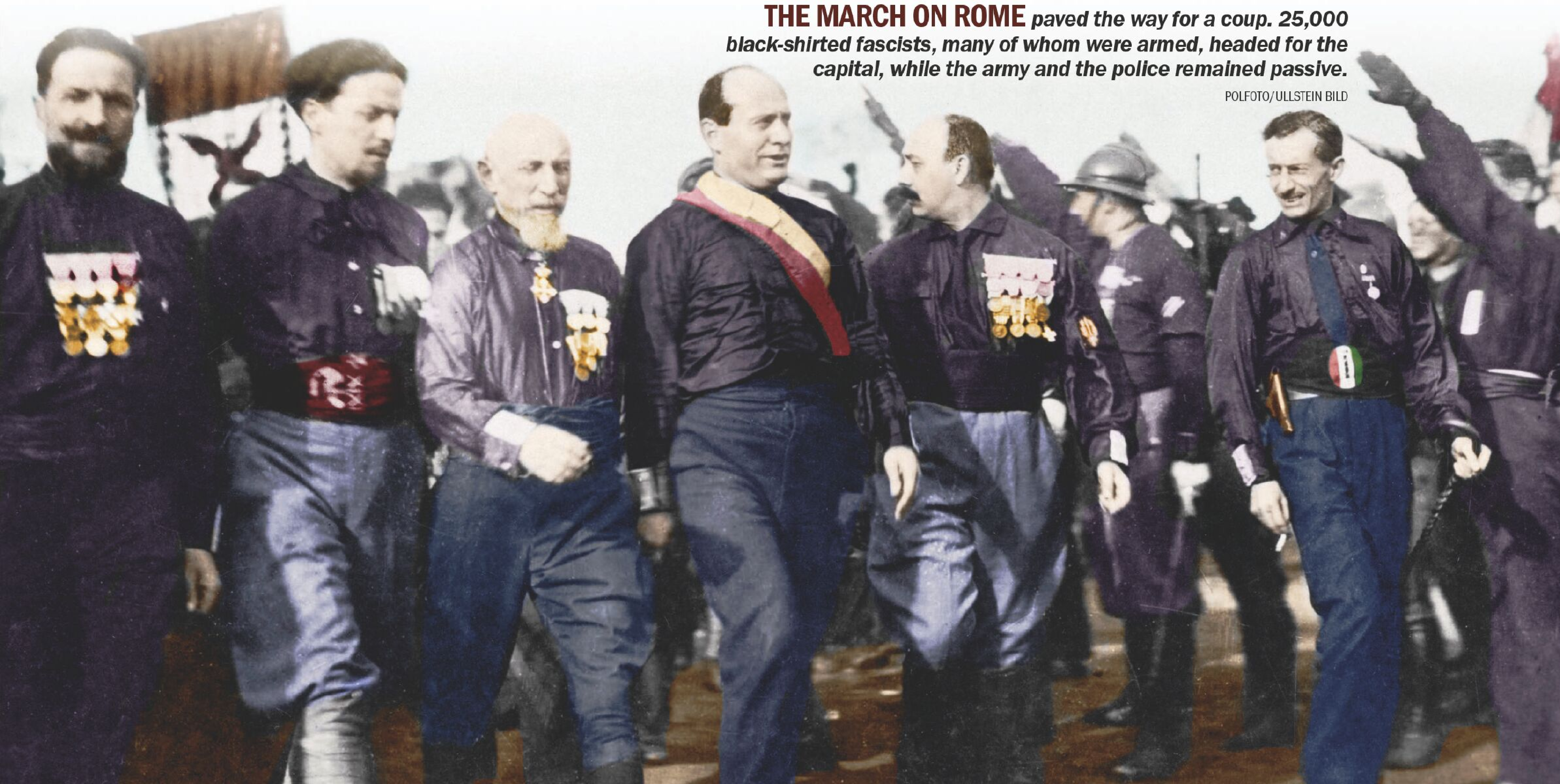
In the beginning, it was easier to see what Mussolini was opposed to, rather than what he was for. The enemy was everyone, who, according to Mussolini, had abandoned Italy, and they were many: society's elite, high finance, the church, the government, foreigners across the board – and the old socialists.

Mussolini stood for the parliamentary elections in Milan in November 1919, but was not elected. But almost two years later, his Partito Nazionale Fascista won 35 seats in the Italian Parliament. Mussolini was now a political operator to be reckoned with, but the sudden breakthrough was not won through voting alone. From 1920, the fascists systematically attacked and killed political opponents.

Wearing black shirts and equipped with batons and daggers, the violent fascist gangs fought almost daily against the socialists on the streets of Italy's ▶

THE MARCH ON ROME *paved the way for a coup. 25,000 black-shirted fascists, many of whom were armed, headed for the capital, while the army and the police remained passive.*

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD



cities. Mussolini took no active part in the fighting, but pulled the strings from behind the scenes. “As for the political instruments of power, we have no prejudices. We accept them as necessary, both the legal and the so-called illegal,” he stated.

The terror campaign paid off. During the spring and summer of 1922, the fascists seized power in several cities, a manoeuvre that cost around 2,000 lives. The fascists were now by far the most powerful group in Italy, and it was time for the last big leap. In early October Mussolini warned: “Either the government gives us power, or we take it by marching on Rome”.

A few weeks later, in pouring rain, 25,000 black shirts, lead by Mussolini, marched on the Italian capital. The army could have easily stopped this show of force, but it remained inactive, and on 29 October the King – Vittorio Emanuele 3 – appointed Mussolini to the new government.

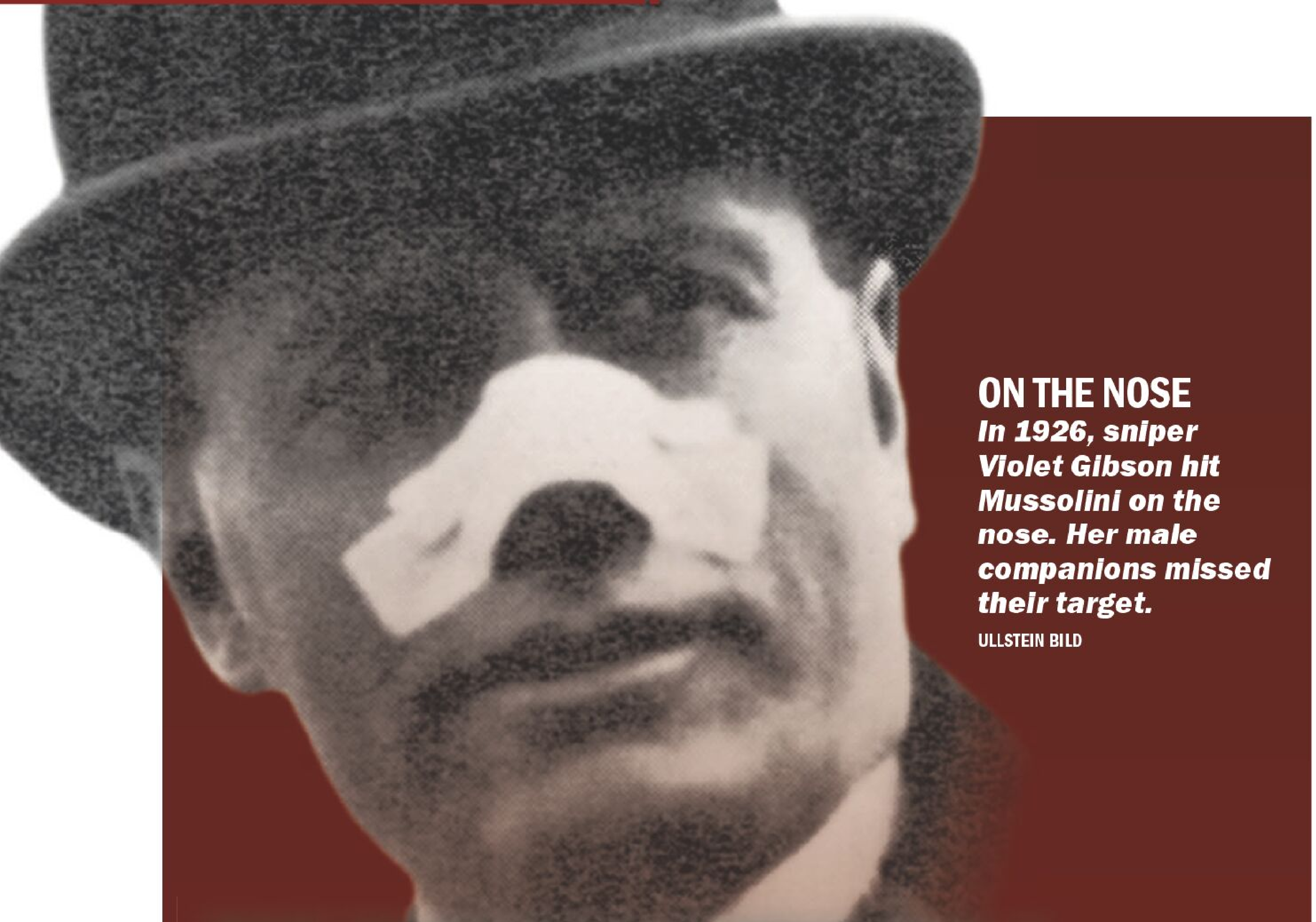
A brutal murder triggered a crisis

Mussolini lodged at the five star Grand Hotel, where he administered his kingdom. His wife, Rachele, and children, Edda, Vittorio and Bruno, were left behind in Milan, because, as he had announced to the journalists who were queuing up to interview him, nothing would get in the way of power. The secret of political success was “to let his heart be a desert” – though he failed to mention his Jewish mistress, Margherita Sarfatti.

One of Mussolini’s first acts was to restore order, and while he toiled around the clock to create a strong state, new members flocked to his party. In the period from October 1922 to December 1923 alone, membership climbed from 300,000 to 783,000.

Lower corporate tax and shorter working hours were some of the treats, with which Mussolini spoiled his people. And in the election of April 1924, the Italians rewarded him by giving the fascists a comfortable majority of about 65 % of the vote. Mussolini could now form his own government without having to negotiate with others.

But rumours of vote rigging swirled. In a speech to parliament, a few weeks later, the socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti accused Mussolini of fraud. It cost him dearly. On 10 June, 1924, he was kidnapped in



ON THE NOSE
In 1926, sniper Violet Gibson hit Mussolini on the nose. Her male companions missed their target.
ULLSTEIN BILD

THE DICTATOR SURVIVED A STRING OF ASSASSINS

Mussolini was unbelievably lucky, having survived no less than three snipers and one bomb.

“Bullets pass, but Mussolini remains”, said Mussolini in a speech in April 1926 after he survived an assassination attempt for the second time within a few months. There were repeated attempts on the dictator’s life, but, miraculously, he always escaped unhurt or only slightly injured. This ability – or good fortune – to escape death cemented the myth of Il Duce as a superhuman being.

The first time that Mussolini was close to being in the firing line was in November 1925 when socialist Tito Zaniboni rented a room at a hotel across from Palazzo Chigi in Rome, where Mussolini was to give a speech. Zaniboni intended to shoot the dictator with a rifle as he stepped out onto the balcony, but the police uncovered the plan and prevented the shooting at the last moment.

The next assassination attempt took place on the morning of 7 April, 1926. Here a presumably mentally-ill Irish woman, Violet Gibson, tried to shoot Mussolini, after he had delivered the opening address at a medical congress in Rome. Mussolini was leaving in a car, when he was grazed on the nose by a bullet. While an enraged crowd threw themselves at Violet Gibson, Mussolini’s wound was dressed and, undaunted, he resumed his typically packed programme for the day.

That afternoon he stressed in a speech to party and government members that “you have to live dangerously”. “If I go on, follow me. If I retreat, kill me. If I die, avenge me,” he roared.

Just five months later, on 11 September, 1926, in Rome, someone again tried to murder Mussolini. The perpetrator was Gino Lucetti, an Italian anarchist, who threw a bomb at Mussolini's car. The dictator himself escaped unhurt from the assassination attempt, but eight people were injured, and Lucetti was sentenced to life imprisonment.

15 year-old anarchist Arturo Zamboni did not get off so easy when, on 31 October in the same year, he shot at Mussolini during a parade in Bologna. Once again, Mussolini avoided being hit, but Zamboni was slaughtered on the spot by a crowd furious fascists.

MUSSOLINI'S WOMEN

In 1911, Mussolini met 31 year-old **MARGHERITA SARFATTI**, a journalist and art critic from an influential Jewish family. She was married and was the mother of three children, but she was also Mussolini's mistress, speechwriter and assistant. When Mussolini introduced racial laws in 1938, he dropped Margherita, who fled to Argentina. She was later known as "fascism's Jewish mother".

1911

ULLSTEIN BILD

Rome, and some months later his remains were found in a forest.

The situation was dangerous for Mussolini. Although there was no concrete evidence, everything pointed to him as the mastermind behind the murder. A newspaper wrote about it in very stark terms. Confidence in Mussolini crumbled. So he had to act before others took the initiative and forced him out of government. Thus, with his usual authority, he went to parliament on 3 January and accepted blame: "I declare before this assembly and the Italian people that I – and I alone – accept the historical, moral and political responsibility for what happened".

He then promised to clean up in the ranks and the country and to achieve this goal, he declared himself dictator.

Pals with the Pope

In 1925, Mussolini abolished freedom of the press and banned all parties other than his own. At the same time, he threw himself into a variety of more or less successful campaigns to improve the nation's economy and his own reputation, in particular.

There were widespread projects to construct housing, public buildings and roads, and, in just a few years, the country's wheat crop was increased fivefold, so the Italians were independent of expensive imports. Swamps were drained, and forest areas cleared so farmers had more farmland. On the other hand, Mussolini failed to abolish poverty in southern Italy or to increase the population.

In an effort to increase the supply of military recruits, Mussolini forbade information on birth control. He also introduced a special bachelor tax and lower taxes for families with more than five children. Mothers of seven children got a medal, and often it was awarded by Il Duce himself, surrounded by flashing cameras. The Italians were subjected to massive propaganda in the media and on posters. "Mussolini got the trains to run on time" and "Mussolini is always right", said a couple of slogans, and in pictures, on postcards and in film clips, they saw Il Duce pose in countless situations: a running Mussolini, a Mussolini drying himself after a swim, a skiing Mussolini and a Mussolini who rode, flew, played the violin or helped farmers with the harvest.

He gave fiery speeches from balconies, and listened as the spellbound audiences cheered. Via scratchy speakers on squares and other places, even in the remotest corners of the kingdom, Italians could keep abreast.

Nothing seemed to be able to stop Mussolini's winning streak and the success went to his head: now he dreamed of recreating the Roman Empire ▶

DEPENDENCE *In the beginning Mussolini looked down on Hitler, but it was soon apparent who was in charge. Mussolini ended up a puppet.*

ALAMY / IMAGESELECT / PICTORIAL PRESS, PICTORIAL PRESS LTD with himself in the role of Emperor Augustus. The city of Rome was to be transformed to reflect the legacy of the old Roman Empire and the empire's rebirth: "In five years, Rome will stand as a wonder for all the peoples of the Earth. Great, orderly, powerful," he proclaimed on New Year's Eve in 1925.

The Italians adored their strong leader. Each year he received over 200,000 fan letters from his subjects. One of the letters was from a teenage girl who confided to him that she had gone to the altar for the first time in her life. "I was filled with hope that I would receive both Jesus and Il Duce," she wrote, adding: "You will both be on my tongue, live in my poor heart. How wonderful".

Jesus – or rather the church – was Mussolini's sore spot. The propaganda had indeed led to Il Duce being on everyone's lips – but the Pope had a special place in the hearts of most people. Pope Pius XI was the only other man with real power in the country, a formidable potential rival, with whom it was wise to be on good terms. All his life, Mussolini had been of the belief that religion was hypocrisy, and, as a young man, he had mockingly called the Catholic Church clergy "black microbes". But now the situation was different: Mussolini needed the Pope's backing to strengthen his power, and at a lavish ceremony in Rome in 1929, he and Pius XI signed the Lateran Treaty. The Pope received the Vatican City in return for recognising Italian sovereignty. Under the treaty, Catholicism was made the state religion and compulsory religious education was introduced in schools, while Mussolini secured the Pope's support for his regime: "Providence has sent us this man," said Pius XI of the dictator, who in his eyes had given Italy back to God and God back to Italy.

> **"Hitler is a plumber in a raincoat – a stupid little clown."**
>
> *Benito Mussolini 1934*

Mussolini called Hitler an ape

With quiet on the home front, Mussolini could now turn his attention outward. He dreamed of making the Mediterranean an Italian sea, and of expanding his kingdom. The country he earmarked for his first conquest was Abyssinia in East Africa.

On 3 October, 1935, the dictator announced that "not only the army, but the entire people of 44 million souls" was rolling across the Abyssinian border at that moment.

The battle was uneven and brutal. With their old rifles, swords and spears, the Abyssinians had no chance. The Italians attacked with bombers, poisoned gas, tanks and machine guns. After eight months of fighting, Mussolini proclaimed his victory and the dawn of a new Italian empire.

Mussolini was stronger than ever, when the Spanish Civil War broke out, in 1936. He had full support to send 70,000 Italian soldiers to war to help the rebel leader, General Franco.

CHILDREN IN UNIFORM

Boys as young as eight wore military uniforms, learned obedience and received weapons training.

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD

CHILDREN WERE BROUGHT UP TO BE GOOD FASCISTS

"I believe in Mussolini's genius" is the first statement of the creed of a children's fascist organisation. And it got worse.

Mussolini felt that the proper upbringing of children would secure Italy's future. Thus, in 1926, he launched a programme to school the younger generation in being good fascists. Schooling lasted 10 years, for children aged 8 to 18.

Boys joined the youth organisation, *Balilla*, which was named after an Italian patriot from the 1700s. Here they were taught obedience, played sports and received weapons training.

The first thing the boys had to learn by heart was the organisation's creed, which included: "I believe in Mussolini's genius, in fascism, our Holy Father, in the fascist martyrs' society, in Italy's repentance and the empire's resurrection".

The girls had their own organisation, which placed importance on traditional female virtues. Hammered into the girls' heads was that a woman's place was in the home, and teaching, therefore, focused on cooking, sewing, first aid and midwifery.

Party Secretary Augusto Turati defined the fascist woman's task as "fulfilling her obligations as a daughter, sister, student and friend with exhilaration and joy, despite it being tiring".

Children were also exposed to massive propaganda in school: in 1925, the Roman greeting of an outstretched right arm was made mandatory, and, from 1928, all instructional materials were censored by the government.

In 1939, membership of the fascist youth organisations became mandatory, but long before this, these groups placed considerable pressure on both children and parents to recruit as many members as possible.

MUSSOLINI'S WOMEN

1914

In 1914, Benito Mussolini won over the 34 year-old **IDA IRENE DALSER**, who owned a beauty clinic in Milan. In November 1915, the couple had a son, Benito Albino. Only a month later, Mussolini married another woman, Rachele Guidi. Ida Irene was shocked and furious. She insisted publicly and very adamantly that she was already married to Mussolini. This he denied, and when Ida Irene became too great a strain after his seizure of power, he had her locked up in a mental hospital, where she died. Exactly the same fate befell the couple's child.

CRITAMORCINEMA

Germany also supported the fascists in Spain, so Mussolini and Hitler, brought together by circumstances, were now fighting side-by-side. Hitler was also one of the few leaders who had recognised Italy's conquest of Abyssinia.

The two heads of state had met in Venice in June 1934. Hitler admired Mussolini and called him a "brilliant statesman without parallel". The admiration was not mutual. In close circles, Mussolini called the German Führer "a plumber in a raincoat", "a gramophone stuck on the same track" and "a stupid, little clown". He also criticised "the prattling ape's" ideology, which he called "100 percent racist".

In November 1936, the piper whistled a different tune. Now Mussolini declared a Rome-Berlin Axis, had been created "which all European countries that want peace can support".

In September 1937, he went on his first official visit to Germany, where a lifetime experience awaited him. In an attempt to impress Il Duce, the Nazis expanded their propaganda apparatus in Berlin, and Mussolini was overwhelmed by the big parades with endless rows of soldiers and by a crowd of 800,000, who despite rain and thunder, had come to hear him speak.

In front of the enthusiastic Germans, Mussolini laid out the ideological kinship between the fascists and the Nazis and stated that "Germany and Italy are the largest and most authentic democracies in the world".

A Pact of Steel with the Nazis

The visit convinced Mussolini that the Nazis were invincible and an example to follow. Thus, in 1938 – to the dismay of his Jewish mistress – he introduced anti-Jewish laws such as those that existed in Germany.

In May 1939, Mussolini and Hitler entered the Pact of Steel, obliging Italy and Germany to support each other in case of "warlike entanglements" with third countries. The alliance was fatal to Mussolini and all of Italy.

Even before the outbreak of World War II, many Italians were sceptical of friendship with the Germans. They feared that Hitler's inevitable talk of war and expansion would end up becoming a reality and bring the Italians immense problems. They were right. Although Il Duce had secretly allowed Hitler to understand that Italy was not ready to go to war before "the end of 1942", the Führer had no intention of waiting that long.

On 1 September, 1939, Germany attacked Poland, afterwhich Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II was in progress, but despite the Pact of Steel, Mussolini hesitated to get involved.

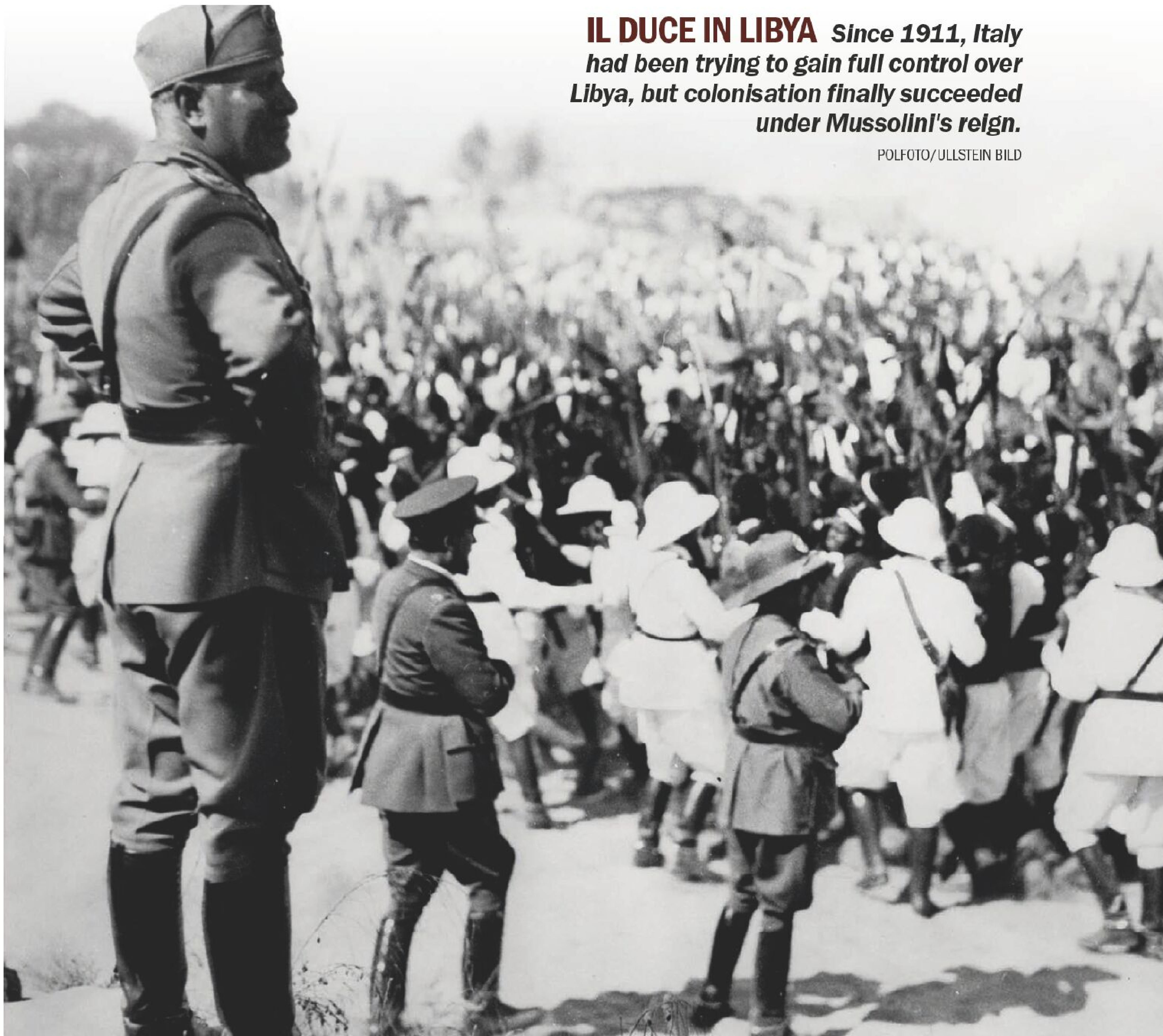
Only after the Germans had swept through Belgium, Holland and France in May 1940, did he decide to jump on the victor'swagon, so Italy could get a piece of the pie.

The army's Chief of Staff, Pietro Badoglio, warned Mussolini that the army was totally unprepared and did not have enough uniforms and weapons. But Mussolini assured him that the war would be over in September that same year: "We only need a few thousand dead to be able to participate in peace talks as a warring power," emphasised Mussolini.

In June 1940, he ordered his troops to attack France.

Italy's war effort was a farce

Mussolini's career as a warlord was a flop. He ordered several major offensives around the Mediterranean region, but each campaign was a fiasco. In Egypt, the Italians were defeated by a much smaller British force, and in ▶



IL DUCE IN LIBYA *Since 1911, Italy had been trying to gain full control over Libya, but colonisation finally succeeded under Mussolini's reign.*

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD

Greece only massive German aid prevented total humiliation.

Defeat followed defeat, and Mussolini's popularity crumbled likewise. The Italians were beginning to starve and lacked everything from medicine to clothing. Soldiers at the front had to contend with completely inadequate equipment, no maps, terrible organisation and a cause they did not truly believe in. Tens of thousands of them surrendered – many without a fight.

Not once did Mussolini think he was complicit in the disasters facing his country. He blamed his senior officers and carried out extensive purges. He suffered violent mood swings and promised the Italians a quick victory one day, only to mock his them the next. He called them "sheep" and "a soft and unworthy people".

In August 1941, his son, Bruno, died in a plane crash, and in addition to his grief, Mussolini had severe stomach pains and lost all his hair. Due to his shiny, bald crown, he was nicknamed "provolone" after a kind of spherical, yellow cheese. Respect for the once-powerful leader was luke warm at best.

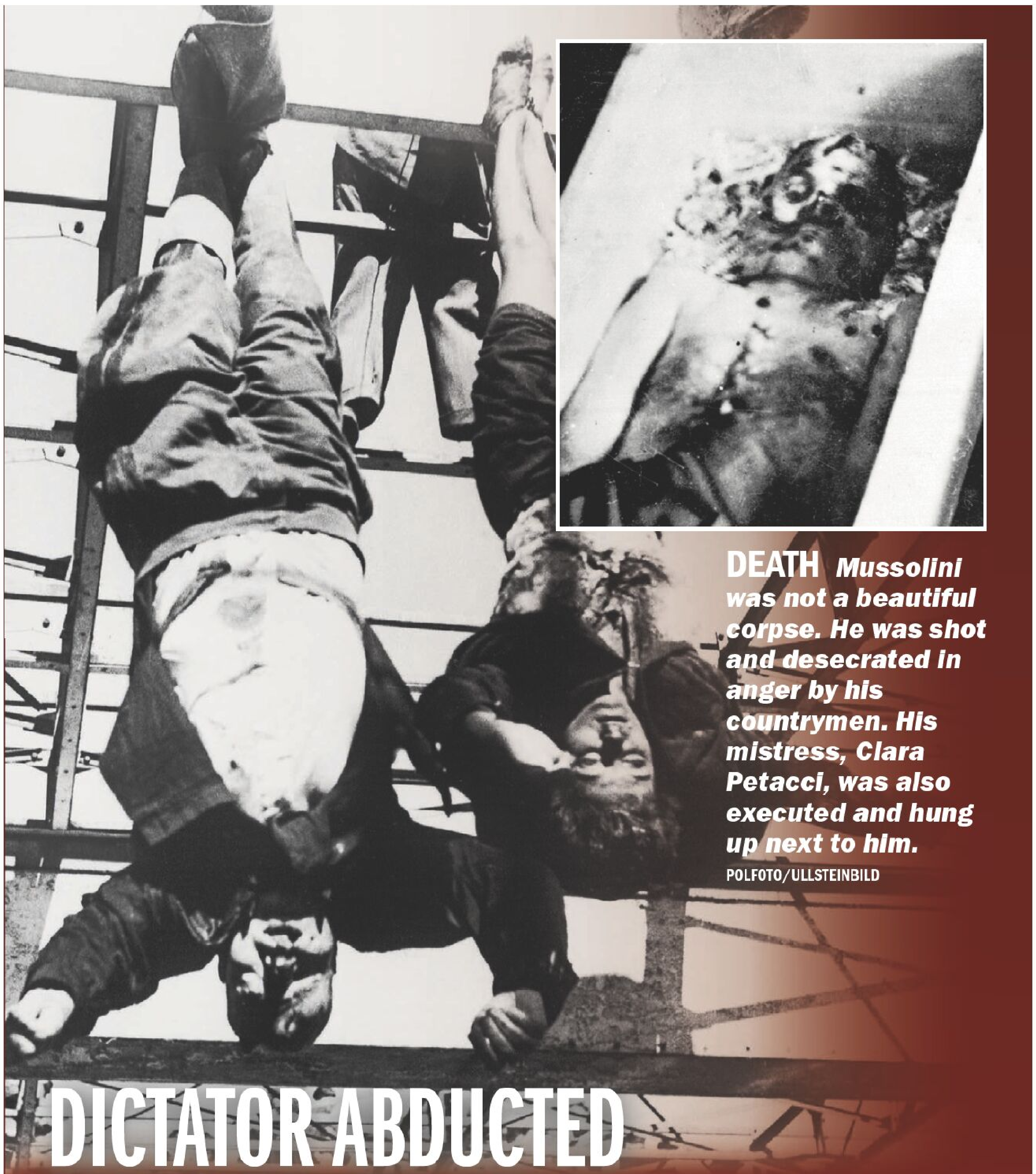
On 10 July, 1943, the Allied forces landed on Sicily, making it clear that Italy was beaten.

Two weeks later the Fascist Great Council called a crisis meeting at the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, and although Mussolini was plagued by stomach pains, he came ready for battle and gave a two-hour speech in which, disjointedly and with numerous pauses, he tried to defend himself against criticism. It did not help: after a vote, Il Duce was deposed as dictator, a decision that King Vittorio Emanuele III supported: "You are the most hated man in Italy", he said to Mussolini, who was arrested and detained at an empty ski hotel two kilometres above the Grand Sasso plateau in the middle of the country.

Here, in what the ex-Duce called "the world's highest prison", he submerged himself in the works of Nietzsche and wrote letters, including one to his wife. In it he assured her that for 21 years he had "worked unselfishly, endlessly, and with complete loyalty to Italy" and that his "conscience is clear".

Strung up at a patrol station

During Mussolini's imprisonment, Italy



DEATH ***Mussolini was not a beautiful corpse. He was shot and desecrated in anger by his countrymen. His mistress, Clara Petacci, was also executed and hung up next to him.***

POLFOTO/ULLSTEINBILD

DICTATOR ABDUCTED FROM HIS GRAVE

Mussolini literally lost his head when three of his fascist worshippers removed his corpse from his unmarked grave.

In life and death Benito Mussolini aroused strong feelings among his followers. Shortly after being captured by partisans and executed, in April 1945, Il Duce was buried in an unmarked grave in a cemetery in northern Milan. But during Easter in the following year, three fascists succeeded in locating grave.

Under the cover of darkness, they quickly excavated the decomposing corpse and put it in a wheelbarrow, but as they hurried away with their cache, the head and other body parts fell off the corpse. After several hours, the trio managed to get Mussolini's body into a car and escape. At the open grave they had left a note with the words: "Finally, O Duce, you are with us. We will cover you with roses but the scent of your strength will overpower the smell of these roses". In reality, it was hardly the scent of roses that the fascists could smell as they grappled with the decomposing body.

After a large-scale search, police found Mussolini's abducted corpse in August 1946, hidden in a chest in a monastery, just outside Milan. After which the authorities kept the dictator's remains hidden for over 10 years, and it was only in 1957 that his widow, Rachele Mussolini, succeeded in retrieving them.

That same year the ex-dictator was laid to rest in his family's grave in his hometown of Predappio in northern Italy. Here stands a marble bust of Mussolini, whose pugnacious jawline greets the floods of visitors who still come to worship him.

MUSSOLINI'S WOMEN

In 1932, Mussolini began an affair with Roman CLARA PETACCI, who was 29 years his junior and married to an army officer. The relationship was secret at first, but became widely known after Clara's divorce in 1936. At the end of the war, Clara Petacci fled with Mussolini. The couple were arrested, executed and finally strung up side-by-side.

ULLSTEIN BILD

declared a ceasefire on 8 September, 1943, and went over to the Allied side. By then the Germans had moved heaven and earth to locate Mussolini, as they wanted to put him in charge of a buffer state in northwestern Italy. Heinrich Himmler went so far as to consult an astrologer to find Il Duce. Eventually the Germans succeeded, and on 12 September, 1943, Mussolini was freed in an extremely daring raid. If Mussolini had expected to regain his former glory as a leader in the German-occupied northern and central Italy, the so-called Salòrepublik, he was greatly disappointed. He was reduced to a puppet in the hands of the Germans and saw himself as "a mayor who is trying to stand upright in quicksand".

Yet, he managed to get revenge on his son-in-law, former Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, who was married to Mussolini's daughter Edda and had been one of the driving forces behind Mussolini's dismissal and arrest in July. In September 1943, Ciano was arrested, to be later executed as a traitor.

From his residence in the town of Gargnano on Lake Garda, where he lived with his mistress, Clara Petacci, Mussolini ordered any Italian who took up arms against the Germans be killed: indeed, he said that for each fascist or Nazi who was killed, at least 10 anti-fascists should be shot. But death was about to sneak up on Mussolini himself.

In early 1945, most of Italy was liberated, and in the war's final days, Mussolini tried to escape with a German military convoy that was retreating northward. On 27 April, 1945, the convoy was stopped and captured by Italian partisans, who found Mussolini hidden under a blanket in one of the trucks, holding two loaded firearms.

Weak and unable to resist, Mussolini was arrested and brought to the town hall of Dongo, where, on the morning of 28 April, he was reunited with his mistress, Clara Petacci. That same day, the couple were sentenced to death by firing squad. The sentence was carried out at 16:10. Mussolini died without dignity, sitting astride a chair with his back to the firing squad.

The following night, the two bodies were taken to the Piazzale Loreto in Milan on the back of a truck. Early in the morning of 29 April, they were dumped on the square. Rumour spread quickly, and people swarmed to take leave of the hated dictator. With sticks or bare hands, they beat Mussolini's corpse and trampled, spit and urinated on it. As a final humiliation, he and Clara Petacci were strung up upside-down from the canopy of a petrol station. In the very city where Mussolini had begun his ascent to the heights of power, his mutilated corpse was now exhibited with derision. ■

Mussolini's granddaughter: Playboy bunny and party leader

Alessandra Mussolini, born 1962, followed in her grandfather's political footsteps and has repeatedly stated that she is "proud to be a fascist".

In the 1980s, blonde Alessandra began a career as an actor and pop singer with the help of her aunt, superstar Sophia Loren, but she caused a scandal when she appeared undressed on the front of men's magazine, *Playboy*, in 1983.

Alessandra then chose to go into politics. In 1992, she was elected to the Italian Parliament for the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano party, which in 1994 changed its name to Alleanza Nazionale. Along with media king and right-winger Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia and the right-wing party Lega Nord, Alleanza Nazionale won a major election victory in 1994, but in 2003 Alessandra Mussolini left her party in anger when party leader and Deputy Prime Minister, Gianfranco Fini, called fascists "an absolute evil" and apologised for Mussolini's race laws.

Alessandra founded a new party, Alternativa Sociale, which she represented in the European parliament in 2004. In 2008, she was again a member of the Italian Parliament, where she belonged to the Berlusconi alliance of right-wing parties parlament.

IL
POPOLO
DELLA

BERLUSCONI'S TRIUMPH ***The photogenic blonde fascist has graced several of Berlusconi embossed campaigns.***

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD

Albert Speer

ARCHITECT ORGANISED WAR EFFORT

Albert Speer was an architect and ordinary member of the Nazi party, but his career took an upward curve when Hitler took a liking to his style. In 1942 an unexpected event gave Speer the chance to move to the top.

From 1942, Speer transformed Germany's factories to war production, including the manufacture of tyres for tanks.

THE STAGE IS SET

Germany, 1942

Albert Speer has become Hitler's confidant. The Führer's absolute trust in his chief architect has secured Speer a seat at the top of the Nazi Party without having worked his way up. Speer possesses remarkable talent for organisation, and when Hitler makes him a minister, is close to turning the war Germany's way.

The explosion is deafening and can be heard from far away. The aeroplane's wheels have barely left the ground when the pilot loses control. A moment later, the plane is engulfed in a ball of flame and crashes into the ground. Everyone on board is killed, including Germany's Minister of Armaments, Fritz Todt.

A few kilometres from the crash site, officers inform Adolf Hitler and his guest Albert Speer of the accident. Speer is Hitler's personal architect and should have been on board the plane with Todt, but was too tired to fly after the Führer had insisted on a late-night conversation about Germania – a bombastic plan to transform Berlin into the world's capital. Speer has been managing this project, but now receives a new title – Minister of Armaments – as he's swiftly appointed Todt's successor.

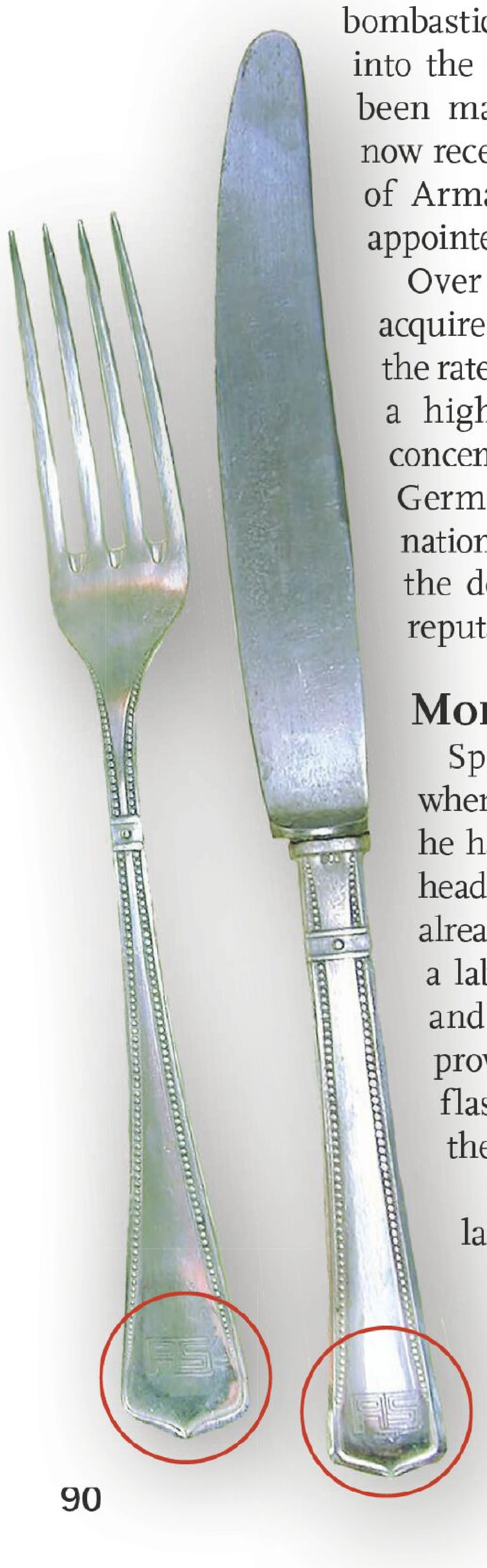
Speer tripled arms production. Using February 1942's output level as a benchmark index of 100, production increased to 222 by the end of 1943 and 322 by July 1944.

Over the following three years, Speer will acquire a reputation as a miracle worker by tripling the rate of weapons production, but it will come at a high price. Millions of prisoners of war, concentration (KZ) camp inmates and underpaid German workers will become enslaved in the nation's many arms factories. Yet Speer will avoid the death sentence at Nuremberg and gain a reputation as "The Good Nazi".

Modern management introduced

Speer knew nothing of arms production when he became minister at 36 years of age, but he had extensive organisational experience as head of the Germania project. The architect had already unscrupulously used prisoners of war as a labour force to produce building materials and clear large residential areas in Berlin to provide space for the wide boulevards and flashy palaces planned for the new capital of the Third Reich.

Speer brought the idea of using forced labour into his new ministerial job. He created a system whereby Russian prisoners of war were transported to industrial areas and put to work in factories under miserable conditions.


Albert Speer had personal cutlery with the monogram "AS" on the shaft of both knife and fork.

The new Minister also tightened up the organisation at higher levels. The core of his idea was industrial self-determination – an idea already advocated by Todt. This principle held that German factories and industrial companies responsible for war production should not be controlled directly by the state, but remain in private hands. Industrial leaders would sign contracts with the government to produce weapons, ammunition and fuel. Both parties agreed on minimum prices and industry's task was to deliver the promised goods. In this way, the companies gained an economic incentive to get things moving. They had an opportunity to make good money, which many did throughout the war.

The work was managed by departments and committees whose chairs were occupied by both private industrialists and employees from Speer's Armaments Ministry. The minister decreed that no head of department be over 55 years old and no one in middle management should be over 50 – older people were too inclined to play it safe, Speer had concluded.

Speer's capitalist approach to production proved effective, but it also put him at odds with the ideological wing of the Nazi Party – not least party leader and Hitler's personal secretary, Martin Bormann. Nazism regarded major industrial companies as blood-sucking parasites that worked against the Nazi ideal of communities based around small businesses and towns. Bormann repeatedly criticised Speer and local party leaders – so-called Gauleiters – weren't enthusiastic either. Speer continuously transferred workers from factories manufacturing consumer goods to the armaments industry. Gauleiters feared that a deteriorating welfare state could undermine their dominance and create a breeding ground for rebellion among the population.

The army – despite early criticism of Speer – quickly agreed to give control of weapons production to Speer's central planning department. The German navy and air force were more resistant – it wasn't until the summer of 1943 that Admiral Karl Dönitz reluctantly accepted a decree from Hitler to transfer production of both weapons and ships to the Ministry of Armaments. "Now Albert Speer has become Europe's economic dictator", Dönitz commented wryly. And ▶

Speer: hero or villain?

EFFICIENT ORGANISER

- 👍 Prevented Hitler from destroying Germany with scorched-earth tactics.
- 👍 Acknowledged and apologised after the war for his role in Nazi Germany.
- 👎 Used forced labour and slave workers
- 👎 Did nothing to stop extermination of Jews and other crimes.

Speer takes the newly developed Tiger tank for a test drive in the autumn of 1943.

it wasn't until the middle of 1944 that the production of aircraft and bombs for the Luftwaffe became part of Speer's wide-ranging brief.

Speer was also given responsibility for the development of various "wonder" weapons – including monster tanks and super bombs – that would win the war for the Germans. The new minister was savvy enough to realise many of these projects were unrealistic and killed most of them off.

Speer had six children. His eldest son, Albert Speer Junior, was an architect like his father and enjoyed a brilliant career with many international commissions.

Hitler was fascinated

Speer's travails with Nazi bosses were magnified by the fact he'd not worked his way up through the party system. The architect joined the party on 1st March, 1931 as member number 474,481 and his way to the top came solely through his architectural abilities.

Speer carried out several renovations for party members such as Karl Hanke and Joseph Goebbels, which brought him to the attention of Adolf Hitler. In 1933, Speer was commissioned for his first project approved by the Führer himself: the parade square in Nuremberg. The Nazis would use the area for giant rallies throughout the 1930s and Speer's proposals met the brief perfectly: an enormous space with a stand at one end, a centrally located pulpit and a majestic eagle on top. Hitler was excited with Speer's ability to achieve what he felt was the key point of architecture: to impress.

A few years later, Speer drew up plans for Hitler's pompous New Reich Chancellery in Berlin, and the design ensured the

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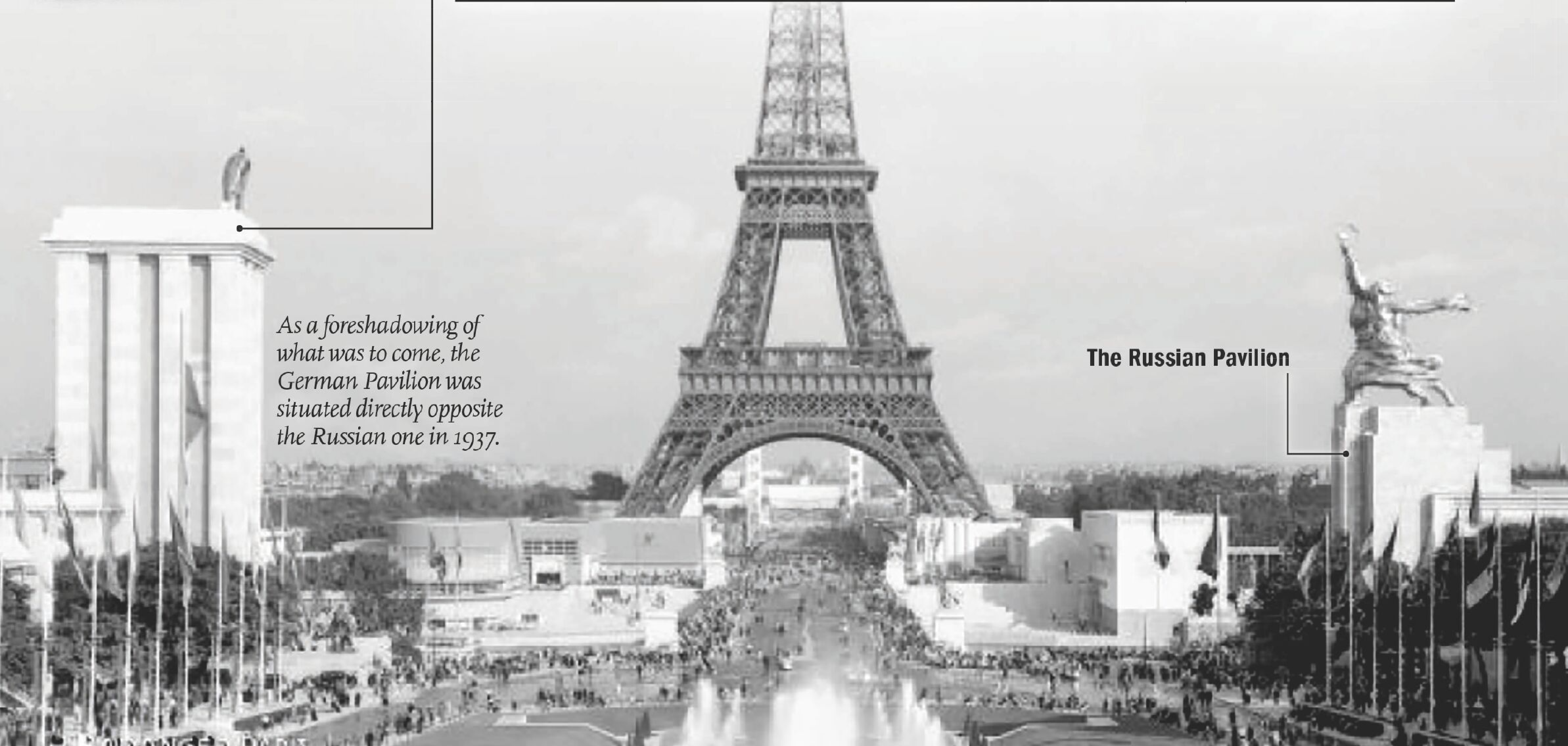
Speer's large and monstrous designs

Hitler believed that architecture's most important function was to impress. Speer lived up to his Führer's wishes with a number of imposing buildings, which were designed to remind the world of Nazi Germany's power and might.

BUILDING	PURPOSE	LOCATION	YEAR	FATE
REICH PARTY CONGRESS GROUNDS	Up to 340,000 participants could take part in rallies.	Nuremberg	1933	The majestic eagle on top was blown away during the war, but the platform still stands.
OLYMPIASTADION	Built specially for the 1936 Olympics to impress the world.	Berlin	1934-36	Today the Olympiastadion (Olympic Stadium) is home to Hertha Berlin Football Club.
PRORA RESORT	This city on the Baltic Coast was designed for 20,000 holidaymakers.	Rügen island	1936-39	Part of the site was rebuilt as holiday homes, but the majority is now in ruins.
THE GERMAN PAVILION	Germany's contribution to the World Exhibition would surpass all.	Paris	1937	It was demolished after the exhibition, but Speer won a gold medal for the project..
NEW REICH CHANCELLERY	Hitler's home was specially designed to intimidate visitors.	Berlin	1938-39	The Chancellery was damaged by bombs, and was later demolished by the Russians.



As a foreshadowing of what was to come, the German Pavilion was situated directly opposite the Russian one in 1937.

Führer could walk through a private park behind the Chancellery with direct access to Speer's office. Together the pair would study a model of Linz, where Hitler planned to move to as a retiree. The Führer enjoyed Speer's company, and the young architect soon became part of the dictator's inner circle. At dinner parties, Speer would usually sit on Hitler's right and the men would absorb themselves in cheerful conversation that other guests couldn't keep up with. Many historians consider their relationship as the closest Hitler ever had. Speer himself said in 1946, "If Hitler had any friends at all, I certainly would have been one of his close friends".

A LIFE WITHOUT LOVE

Speer's close relationship with Hitler gave him a trump card in his fight with the party's hierarchy. The Führer happily issued decrees giving Speer all the necessary powers required to implement his ideas. "Speer, I will sign anything that comes from you", Hitler said. With such unconditional backing, Speer established himself as one of the most powerful men in the Third Reich – a position he'd not normally have reached given his background.

Speer's parents were part of the Mannheim bourgeoisie – his father was also an architect and sufficiently successful to be the first in the city with two cars in his garage. But the family home lacked warmth or affection. Speer wrote many years later that "love was not included in my parents' marriage contract". Neither were they pleased with Speer's choice of partner when he married Margarete Weber aged 23 in 1928. She was the daughter of a master craftsman, an alliance deemed unacceptable for Speer's class-conscious parents. She would not be received as a guest in their home until 1935.

Margarete and Albert's marriage was childless until Hitler announced to him in the mid-1930s that everyone had a duty to bear children for the Fatherland. Mrs Speer dutifully delivered six children in quick succession, but most of the time they were left to a governor, while Mrs Speer lived her own life in one of the family's large houses.

When Speer was finally released from Berlin's Spandau Prison in 1966 after 20 years' imprisonment, Speer's lawyer – Doctor Hans Fläschner – recalled the shiver down his spine when he saw how husband and wife greeted each other after decades of complete separation: "They just gave each other a handshake, and I had to insist that Speer sat down in the back seat next to his wife. He would have preferred to sit in front with the driver".

PRISONERS WERE WORKED TO DEATH

Perhaps the lack of affection in his marriage led to Speer throwing himself into his work providing adequate supplies of gunpowder and bullets to the Wehrmacht.

Shortage of labour was a permanent problem. Factories used either free Germans who could work up to 72 hours a week or prisoners of war, KZ camp inmates and deported workers from occupied countries. Industry usually preferred prisoners of war, thanks to the modest expenses of Himmler's SS Corps, who were responsible for delivering them from the camps. In several cases, Speer's ministry even built prison camps at the factories.

The scheme obviously benefited the SS, which not only got paid for each worker the factories received, but also had the problem of killing prisoners taken out of their hands. Heinrich Himmler called the system "extermination through labour". But the supply of prisoners wasn't enough, so in January 1943, Speer ordered tougher methods be employed in obtaining forced labour from France. "It is no longer necessary to give special consideration to Frenchmen", he wrote. "Recruitment can proceed with emphasis and sharpened measures". Over seven million foreign workers, prisoners of war and KZ camp inmates worked in the armaments industry during the war under such miserable conditions that many didn't survive.

1876-1950

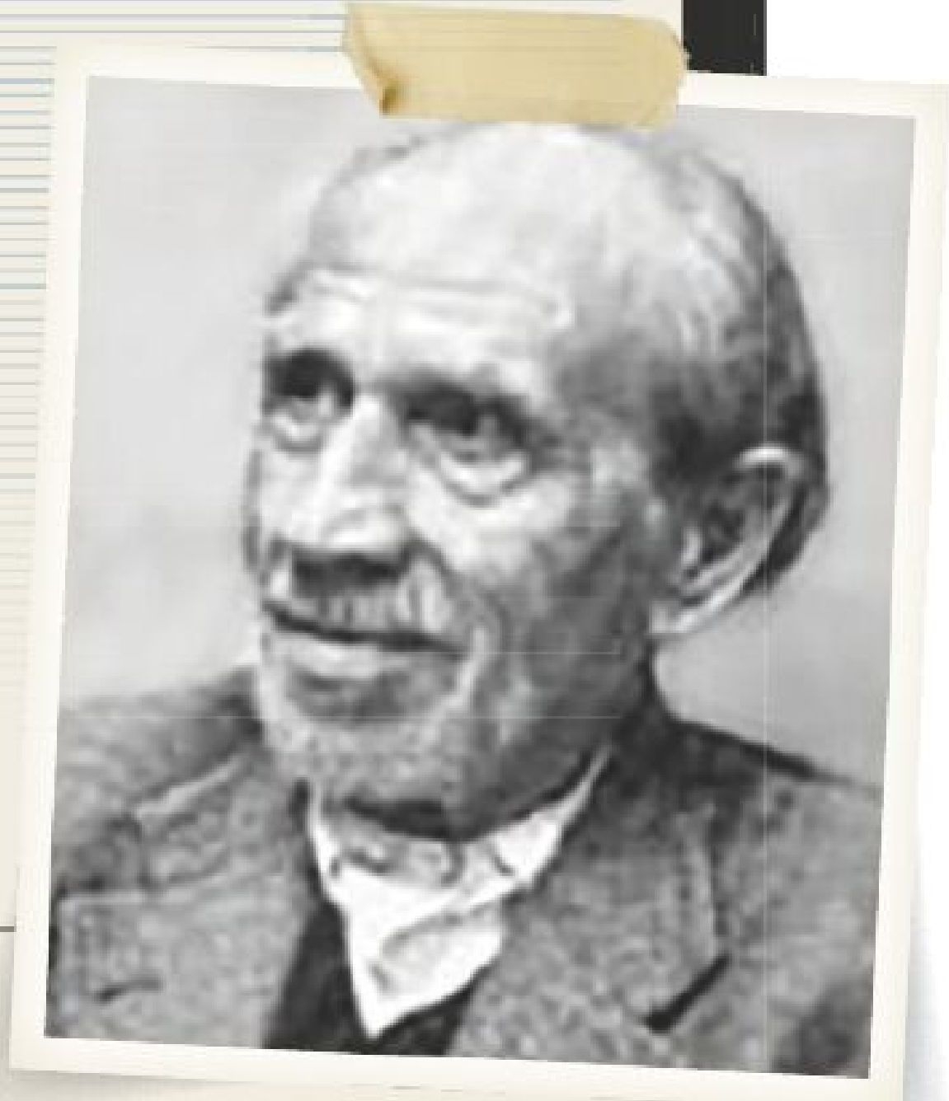
NAME **HEINRICH TESSENOW**

TITLE ARCHITECT

Mentor celebrated simplicity

"The simplest form is not always the best, but the best is always simple", was the motto of Heinrich Tessenow, who taught Albert Speer at the Institute of Technology in Berlin. Tessenow placed craft before imagination and was an important inspiration for Speer.

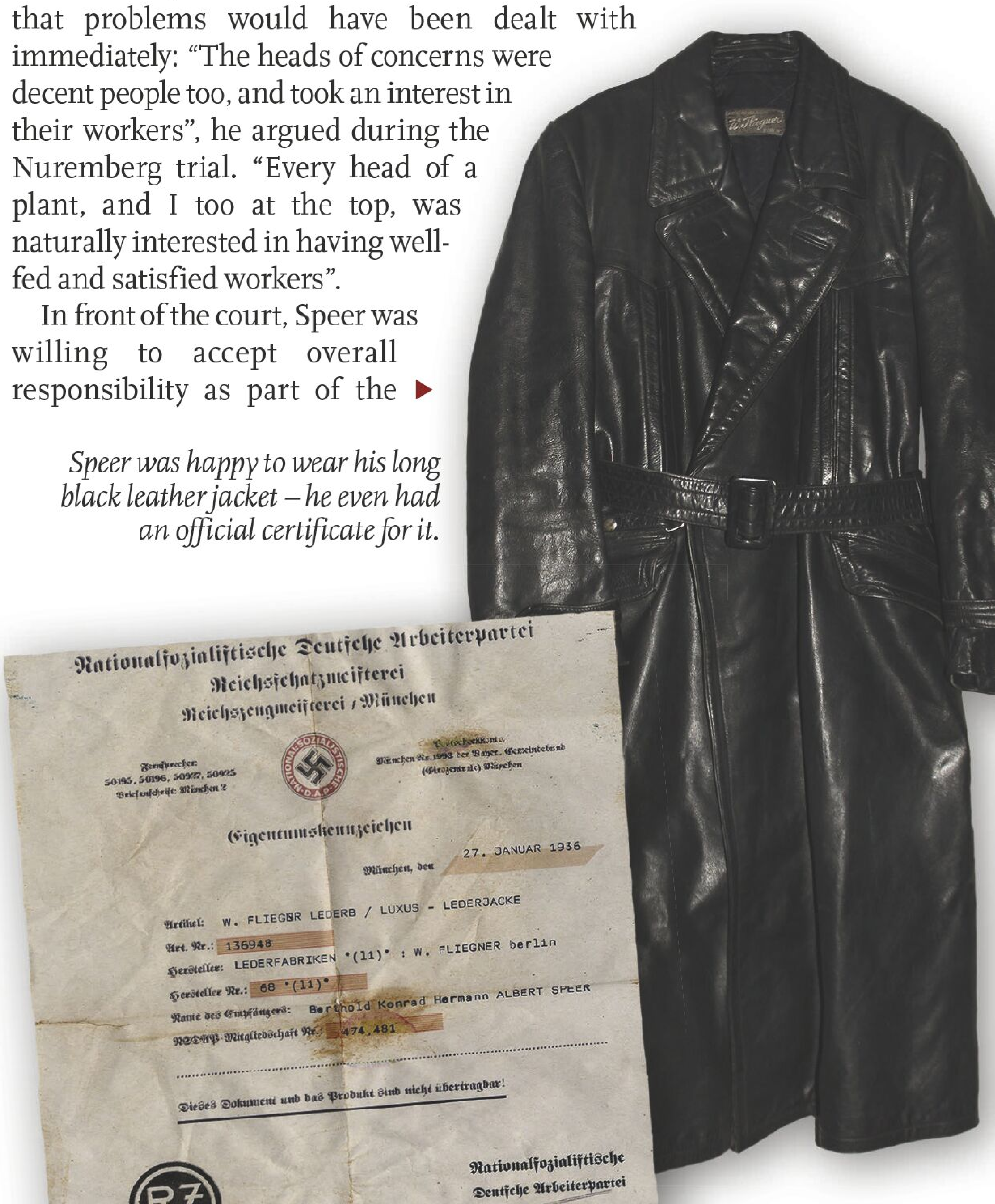
Ironically, Tessenow was removed from his post by the Nazis before Speer rose to prominence in the party.



- **Did not like Speer's buildings.**
- **Taught in East Berlin after the war.**

Speer later acknowledged that he'd used forced labour, but claimed everyone worked under decent conditions and that problems would have been dealt with immediately: "The heads of concerns were decent people too, and took an interest in their workers", he argued during the Nuremberg trial. "Every head of a plant, and I too at the top, was naturally interested in having well-fed and satisfied workers".

In front of the court, Speer was willing to accept overall responsibility as part of the ▶



Speer was happy to wear his long black leather jacket – he even had an official certificate for it.

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NSDAP-Mitgliedſchaft Nr.: 474,481

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Nationalſozialiſtische
Deutſche Arbeiterpartei

Speer believed he was the closest Hitler ever came to having a true friend.

German leadership, but claimed to know no details or specific examples. He would continue to deny any knowledge of the plans to exterminate the Jews until his death in 1981.

How Speer avoided execution

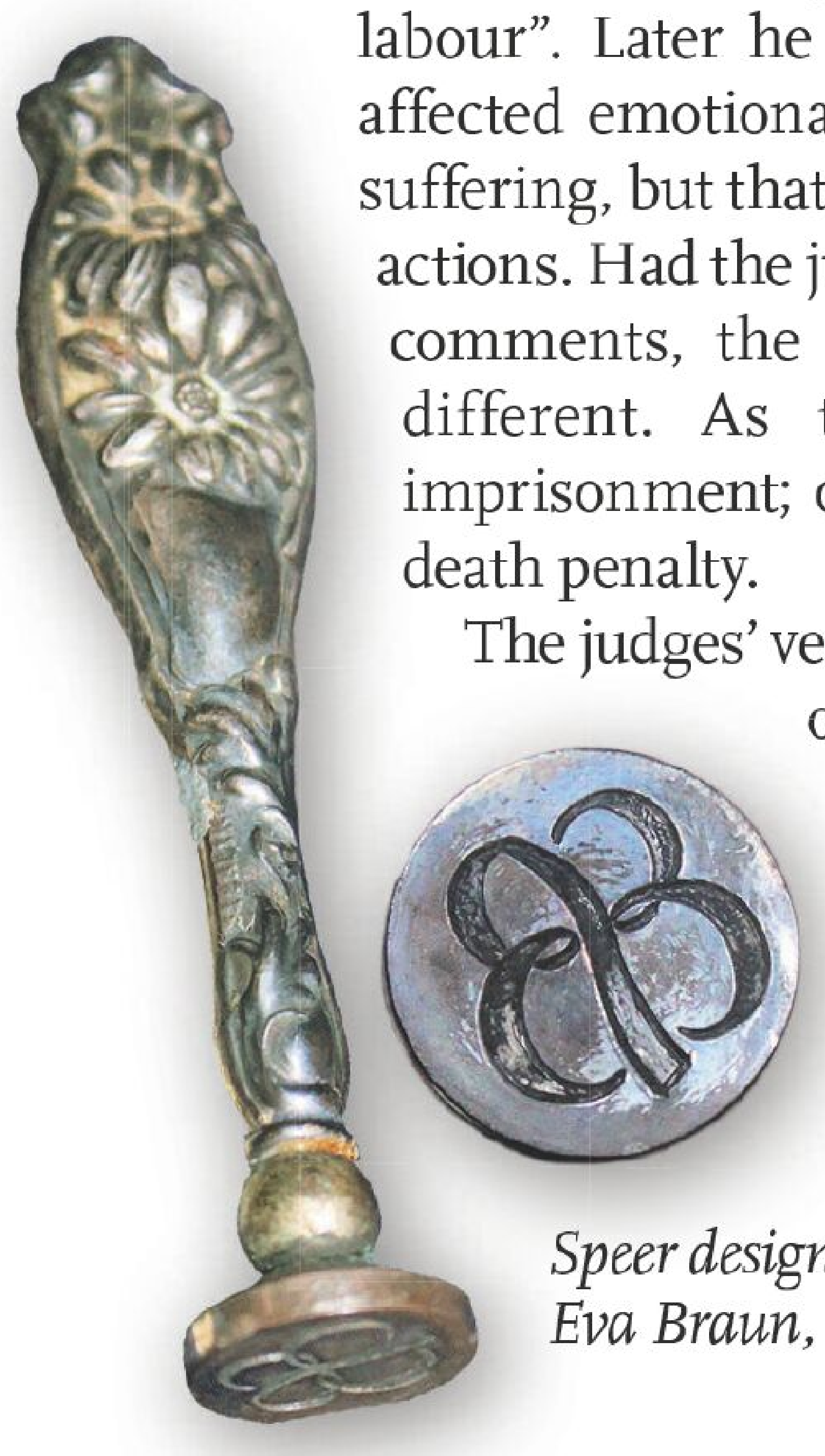
The question of how much Speer actually knew played a crucial role during the Nuremberg trial. The judges ended up handing him a 20-year prison sentence, but did not have access to a number of written sources that are now part of historiography. These include the description of the conditions at the KZ camp at Mittelbau-Dora in Germany.

The camp was a living hell where 20,000 out of 60,000 workers died. Speer visited the plant in December 1943 and expressed approval for what he'd seen, although he denounced the high death rate as a "waste of labour". Later he would write that he was affected emotionally by the sight of people suffering, but that it had no influence on his actions. Had the judges seen Speer's written comments, the outcome of the trial might have been different. As things were, three judges voted for imprisonment; only the Soviet judge wanted to apply the death penalty.

The judges' verdict allowed for the fact Speer was the only one to admit any guilt among the 23 on trial. At the same time, he was one of few intellectuals in the dock, making it easier to distance himself from more "burly" Nazis like Fritz Sauckel and Hermann Göring. Finally, Speer's key mitigation was that he had worked against Hitler's so-called Nero Decree; a scorched-earth policy that would have seen all roads, bridges and production facilities in Germany destroyed as the Wehrmacht retreated. Speer was horrified by the order so largely ignored it. Instead, he dismantled the factories under the pretext of putting them back into operation when the fortunes of war turned. At Nuremberg, Speer successfully argued his goal had been to save the German people from unnecessary destruction.

Erinnerungen

– Memories – is the title of Speer's autobiography that he published in 1969. The book was a bestseller and is an important historical source of reference.



Speer designed a personal seal for Eva Braun, Hitler's longtime mistress.

Death in his lover's arms

Speer made no attempts to escape prison, but after 20 years behind bars he quickly moved up in the world again. He acknowledged a personal responsibility for many Nazi crimes and helped release the Germans from their collective guilt. Some even called him "The Good Nazi". At the same time, Speer sold millions of books describing his experiences at the top of the Nazi hierarchy and the man his life had revolved around: Hitler.

Hitler had committed suicide with his long-standing mistress Eva Braun; Speer died in the presence of his lover in a London hotel. In 1981, the former Armaments Minister travelled to London for an interview with Norman Stone for the BBC. After an initial meeting, Stone asked if Speer wanted to lunch with him. Speer responded with a smile that he must refuse as a beautiful young woman was waiting for him back at his hotel.

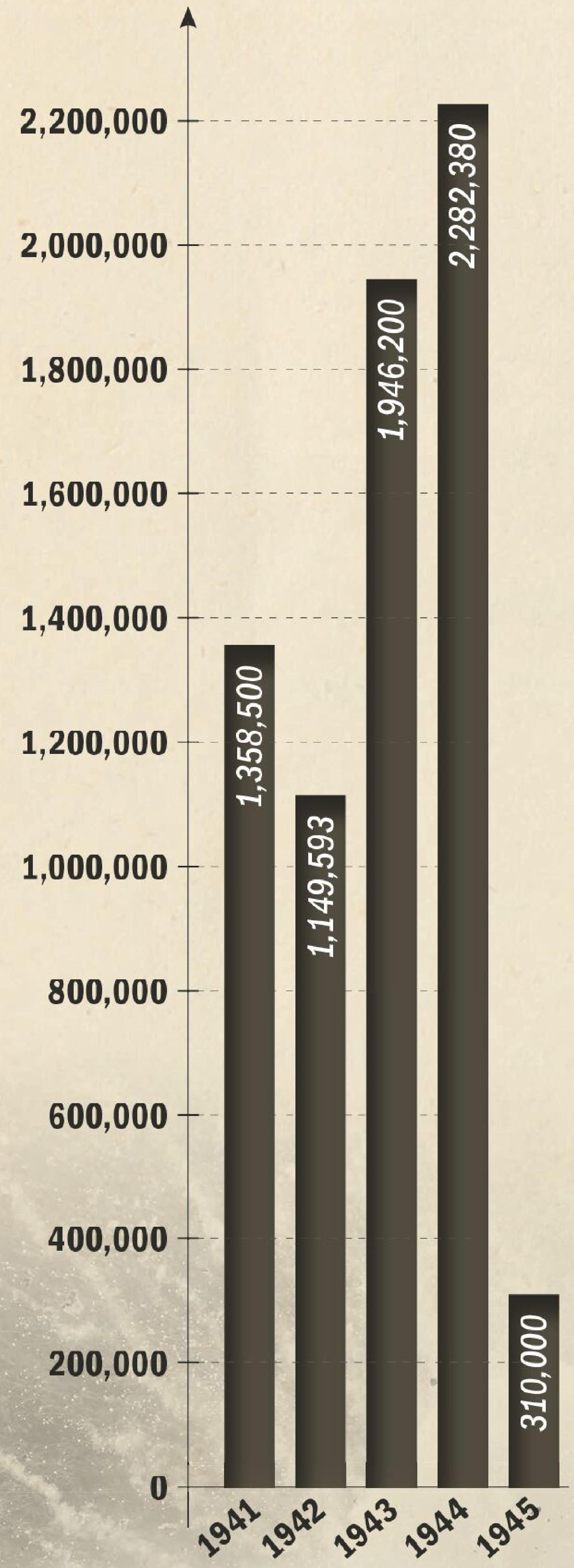
Speer subsequently suffered a cerebral haemorrhage and died in hospital aged 76. Just a few months before he had mentioned the woman as his great love to his German publisher, Wolf Jobst Siedler: "It's sad that I've had to wait until I'm over 70 years to have my first intense erotic relationship", he said.

Speer sped up arms production

Speer quickly doubled Germany's weapons production. Industrialists and government officials managed production together, and the private sector was given the opportunity to make money. The actions worked – despite allied bombardments, the plants churned out more weapons.

Production per year for selected weapons types

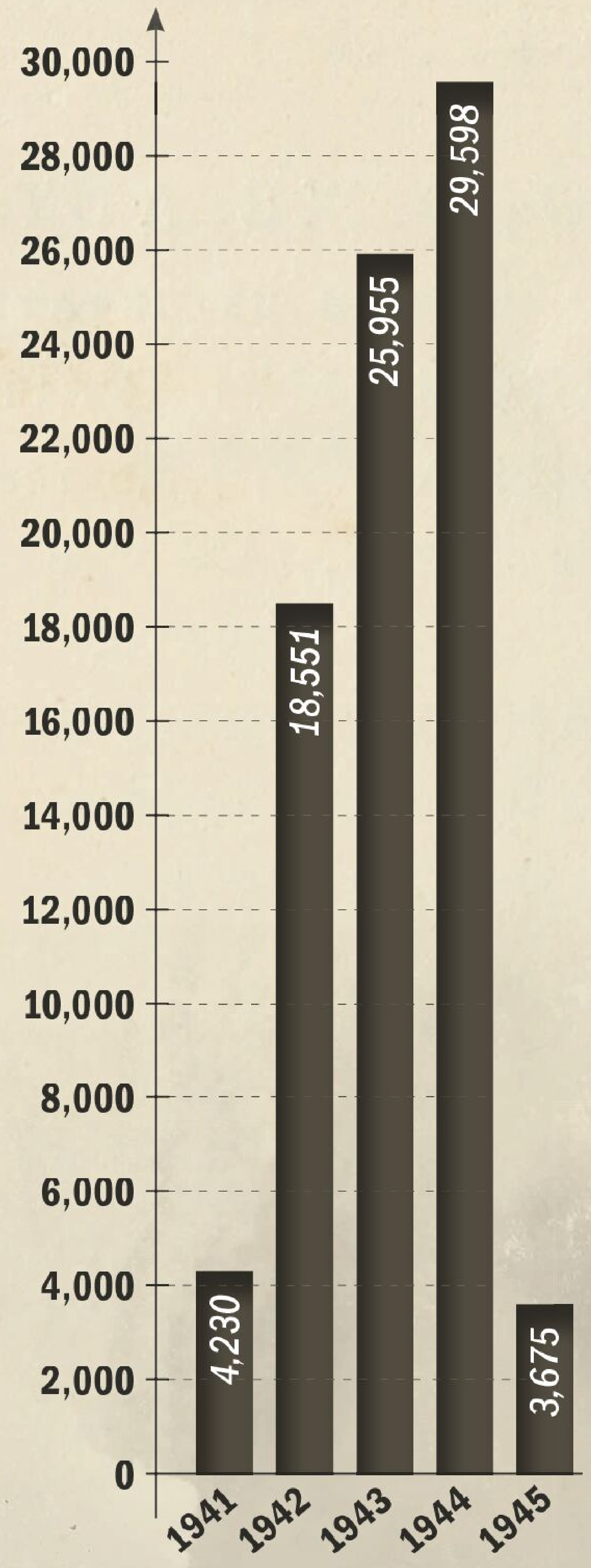
Rifles



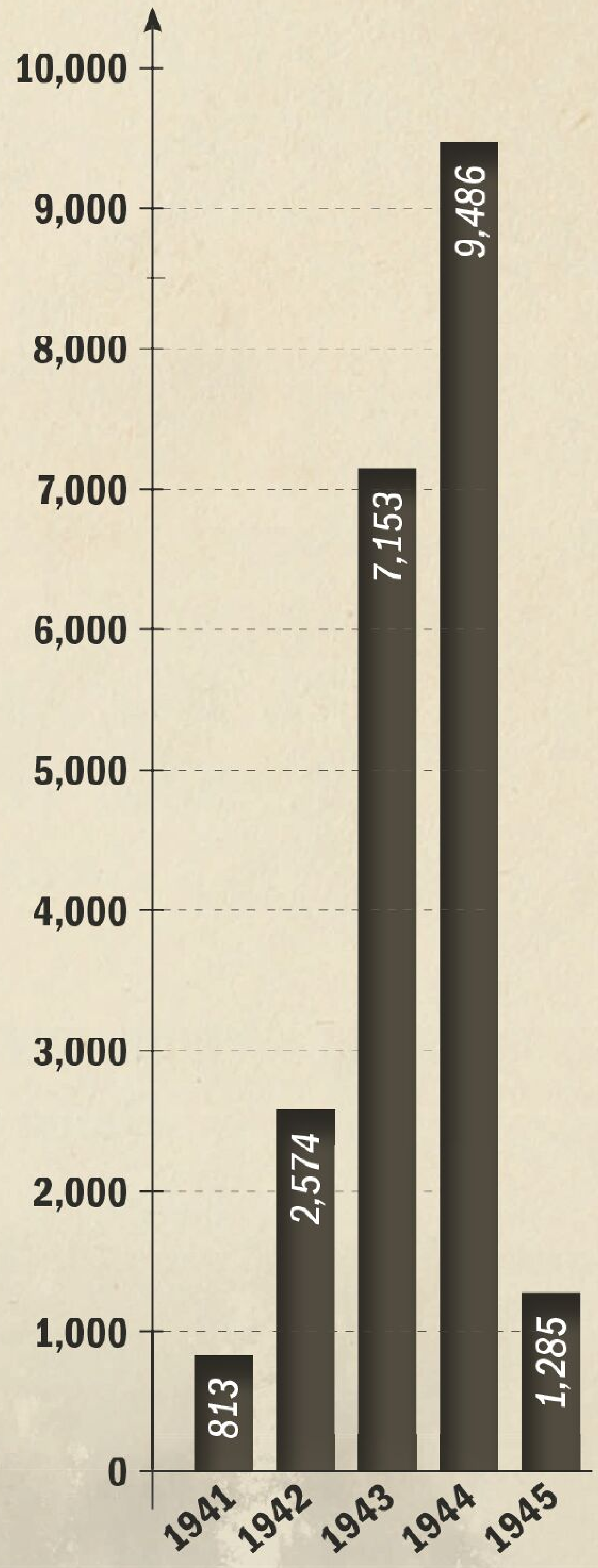
Small arms were critical
Rifles were the soldiers' most important weapon. In 1944 more than two million were produced – including the Karabiner 98k, which was the standard weapon for infantry across the whole Wehrmacht.

Mortars

Granatwerfer was effective
Mortars are effective at close range and can be used without extensive training. Granatwerfer mortars were used extensively in all theatres of war until the end of the conflict.



Armoured personnel carriers



The infantry had to be transported to the Front
Armoured personnel carriers transported soldiers safely to war. Both lightweight and heavy models were used from the invasion of Poland in 1939 until the end of the war.

The Wehrmacht had an almost endless need for armoured vehicles.

960,000 Jews
70,000-75,000 Poles
21,000 R manies
15,000 et priso
of war
10,00
RUDOLF HÖSS

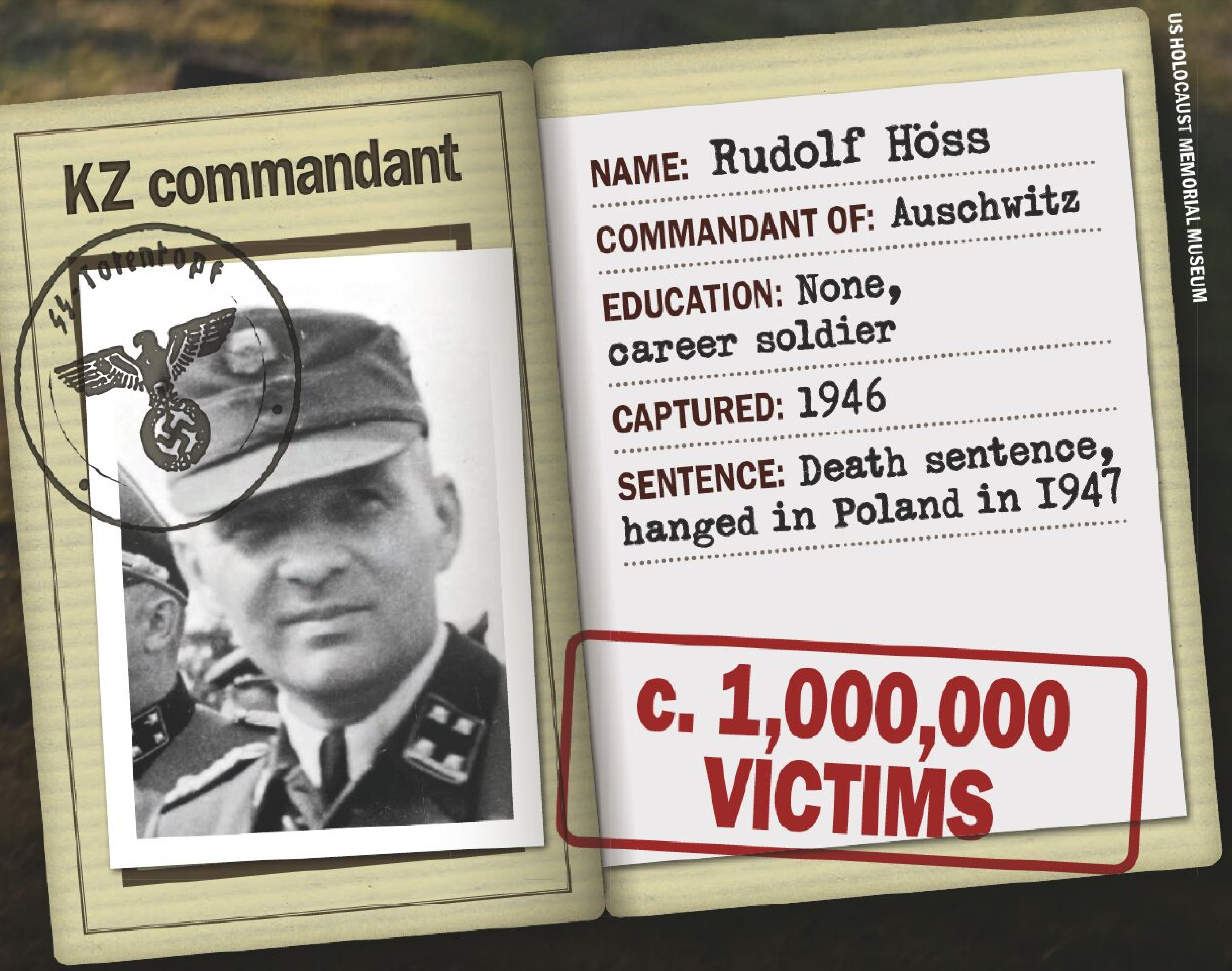
SS commandant Rudolf Höss lived with his family just outside Auschwitz, where he murdered thousands daily.

RAINER HÖSS/INST FÜR ZEITGESCHICHTE MÜNCHEN – BERLIN, SLG. HÖSS, NR. 203 & SHUTTERSTOCK

Rudolf Höss

FAMILY MAN BUILT HITLER'S DEATH FACTORY

In 1940 Rudolf Höss was ordered to build Auschwitz concentration camp. He was neither a fanatic nor a psychopath, but blind obedience made him the greatest mass murderer in history.



KZ commandant

NAME: Rudolf Höss
COMMANDANT OF: Auschwitz
EDUCATION: None, career soldier
CAPTURED: 1946
SENTENCE: Death sentence, hanged in Poland in 1947

c. 1,000,000 VICTIMS

US HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

BY MIKKEL ANDERSSON

It was a shabby-looking Rudolf Höss who bid farewell to the world on 16th April 1947. There was no trace left of the icy, efficient *Konzentrationslager* (KZ – or concentration – camp) commandant who, years before, had wandered through an empire of suffering and death that he had created, dressed in an immaculate SS uniform.

Now Höss embarked on his final voyage wearing an informal, dirty jacket and oversized trousers, his hands tied behind his back. As he stepped up onto the small stool under the noose, he could see the ruins of the death camp that he himself had built and ruled over for years. A camp that more than anything else had come to represent the Nazi regime's worst crimes: Auschwitz.

No one knows what Höss thought in these final moments. But he was the only Nazi death camp commandant to write an autobiography. The book provides an uncanny insight into how a hardworking, dutiful and loving family father became, in his own words, "the greatest destroyer of human beings, who carried out every order to exterminate people no matter what".

Young Höss learned obedience from his father

Rudolf Höss, the man who would one day become the Nazis' greatest mass murderer, was born in 1901 in the spa town of Baden-Baden. His father was a highly religious, retired colonel who raised his son with rigorous discipline. "I was taught to obey all adults, especially older people, and treat them with respect no matter what the circumstances," Höss wrote many years later while awaiting his fate.

According to Höss, he had no playmates as a child. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 led the lonely boy to dream of a soldier's life. Two years into the war, he managed to enlist in the army as a 16-year-old.

After the war, Höss returned home a hardened war veteran, only to discover that his parents had died, and his home had been destroyed. Bitter about the hardships of life he turned to the one community that had never failed him: his fellow soldiers. Höss enlisted in the nationalist *Freikorps* (Free Corps), which in the chaotic years following World War I fought the Communists. In 1922, he joined the strongest of the nationalist groups, the Nazi party, whose leader was another war veteran: Adolf Hitler. Thus, Höss's fate was sealed.

In 1934, following Hitler's takeover of Germany, Höss received an irresistible offer when Heinrich Himmler, the head of Hitler's personal bodyguard, the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), sought him out. The SS, which needed people with Höss's experience, was also responsible for guarding prisoners in the regime's newly created concentration camps where political opponents were increasingly finding themselves incarcerated.

Himmler guaranteed quick promotion and good pay. Höss was persuaded and shortly thereafter transferred to the Nazi state's first permanent KZ camp at Dachau. The camp was commanded by Theodor Eicke, who taught Höss how to manage a concentration camp.

"Anyone who shows even the slightest vestige of sympathy towards them [the prisoners] must immediately vanish from our ranks. I need only hard, totally committed SS men. There is no place amongst us for soft people," Eicke declared.

Auschwitz built to house Polish

World War II started when Hitler's troops invaded western Poland in September 1939. In the wake of the occupation, thousands of Polish nationalists and communists were arrested. The SS therefore decided to build new concentration camps in Poland.

In spring 1940, Höss, who had risen up the SS hierarchy, was sent to south-western Poland to find a suitable site for a camp. Near the small Polish town of Oswiecim – 'Auschwitz' in German – he found a disused barracks that perfectly suited his needs. It was hidden from

KZ system's creator taught Höss

One element of Auschwitz that has etched itself on people's shared consciousness is the infamous sign placed on the gate into the camp: *'Arbeit Macht Frei'* – 'Work Sets You Free'. The motto was devised by SS man Theodor Eicke, who was Höss's teacher. Eicke is considered the architect of the Nazi regime's concentration camp system.

In 1933 Hitler appointed Eicke as commandant of the first German KZ camp, Dachau, which became the model for all later camps. Eicke hailed the idea that hard work and brutal violence could cure the Nazi regime's political opponents of their delusions. Höss became one of Eicke's most loyal employees.

In the camp, Eicke insisted on strict discipline, with even the smallest offence being punished by public whipping, humiliation or death. At the same time, he taught his subordinates that even one's own family should be eradicated if SS doctrines required it.

Theodor Eicke was killed on the Eastern Front in 1943, but Höss continued his mentor's brutal legacy to the bitter end of the war in his own camp, Auschwitz.

ARBEIT
MACHT FREI

THEODOR EICKE

Rudolf Höss learned all about KZ camps when he worked for Eicke.

ULLSTEIN BILD & SHUTTERSTOCK

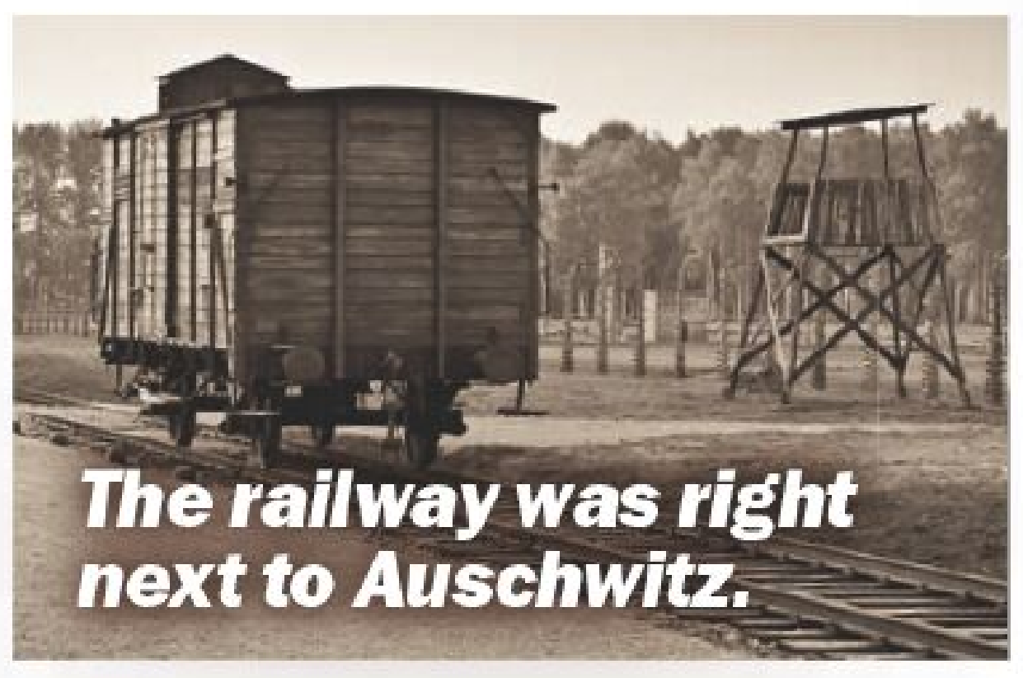
Family villa overlooked camp

The Höss family lived in a villa just a stone's throw from Auschwitz's gas chamber, where from 1942 onwards, Höss' regime murdered Jews and prisoners of war, before burning their bodies in the crematorium.

MIKKEL JUUL JENSEN / BHTL

1 Arrival

Auschwitz is initially built for 10,000 prisoners but is later extended. Prisoners arrive via special trains inside sealed livestock wagons.



The railway was right next to Auschwitz.

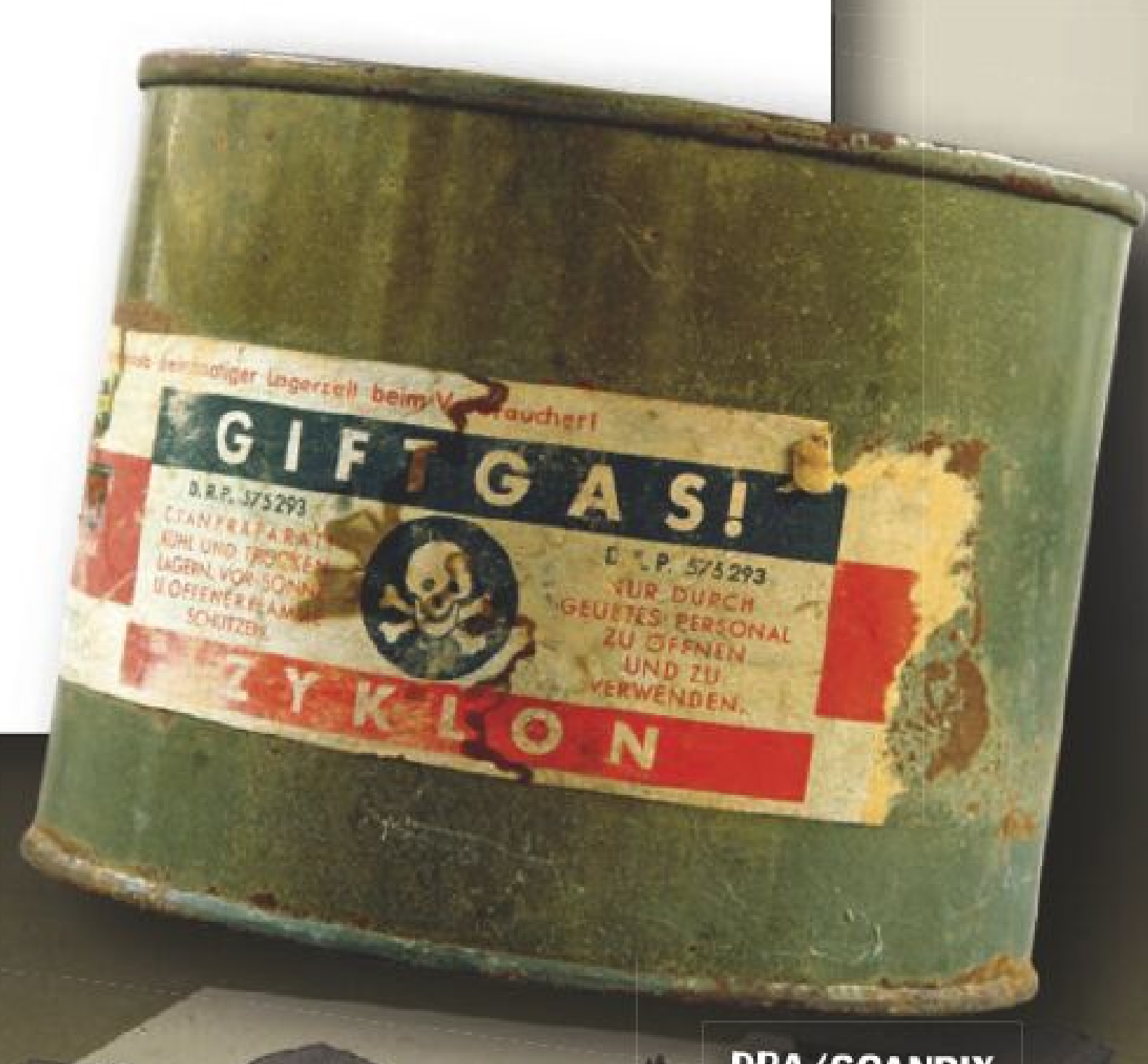
SHUTTERSTOCK

2 The weak are taken aside

After unloading, the prisoners are sorted into two groups at the railhead.

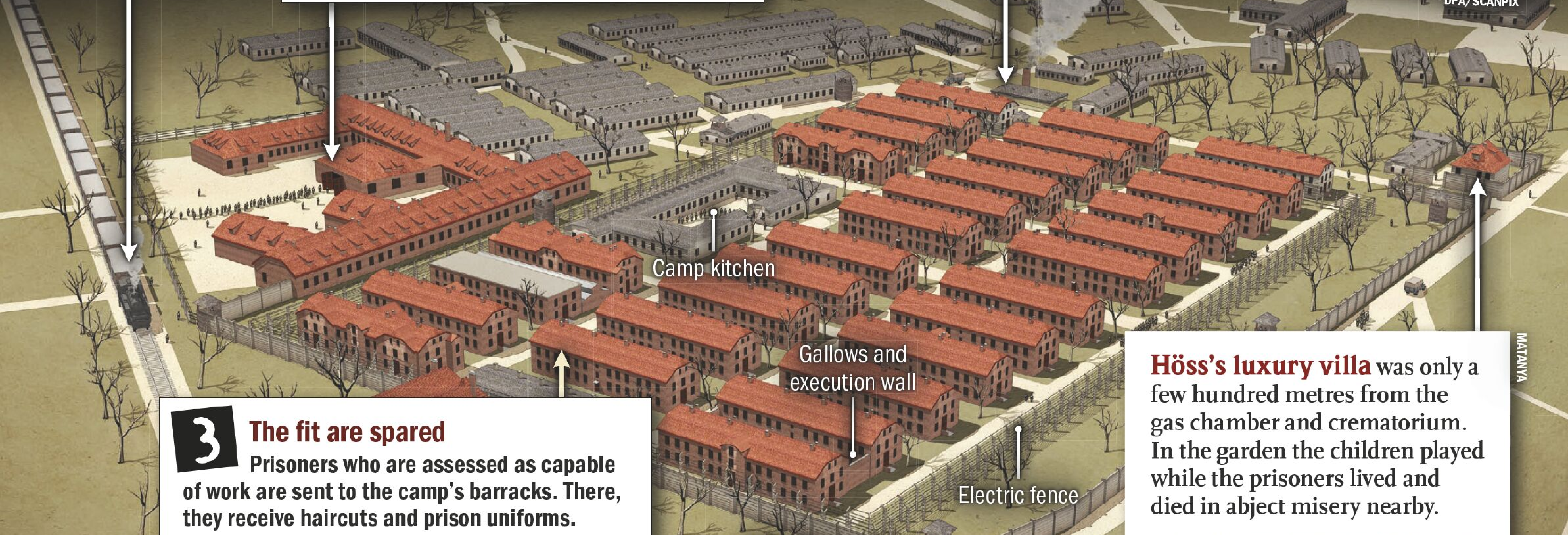
4 The gas chamber exterminates the weak

Those prisoners considered too weak to work are taken to the camp's gas chamber. Here, guards order them to undress for disinfection. Inside the 'shower' room, they are gassed with Zyklon B poison. The bodies are then burned next door in the crematorium.



The Zyklon B poison was poured into the gas chamber through holes in the ceiling.

DPA/SCANPIX



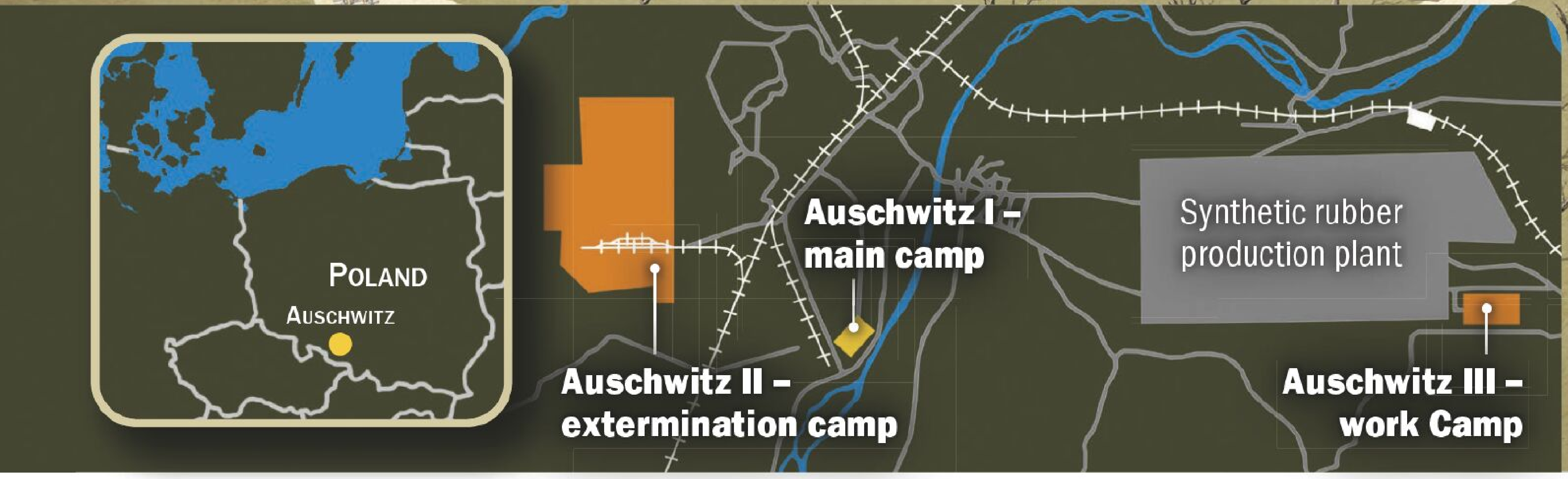
3 The fit are spared

Prisoners who are assessed as capable of work are sent to the camp's barracks. There, they receive haircuts and prison uniforms.

Höss's luxury villa was only a few hundred metres from the gas chamber and crematorium. In the garden the children played while the prisoners lived and died in abject misery nearby.

Höss' two-storey villa is still located at Auschwitz.

MATANYA



POLAND
AUSCHWITZ
Auschwitz I – main camp
Synthetic rubber production plant
Auschwitz II – extermination camp
Auschwitz III – work Camp

the world, easily extendable and several railway lines ran nearby.

The Auschwitz plan was immediately accepted by Himmler, who appointed Höss as the camp commandant.

"In the shortest possible time I was supposed to create a transition camp for ten thousand prisoners from the existing complex of well-preserved buildings. The buildings were filthy and teemed with lice, fleas, and other bugs, and as far as sanitation was concerned, practically nothing was available," wrote Höss, who suddenly seemed overwhelmed by the enormity of the task.

The camp prisoners were to convert the swampy area around the camp into agricultural land that German colonists ▶

KZ commandant

NAME: Franz Stangl

COMMANDANT OF: Sobibor and Treblinka camps

EDUCATION: Weaver, later police officer

CAPTURED: Arrested (1967) in Brazil, extradited to West Germany

SENTENCE: Life in prison

c. 400,000 VICTIMS

YAD VASHEM

Höss impregnated inmate

It was strictly forbidden for the SS at Auschwitz to take mistresses from the camp's prison population. Nevertheless in 1942, Rudolf Höss, the camp commandant himself, initiated a relationship with political prisoner Eleonore Hodys. Höss secretly pressed her to sleep with him, ending the relationship when Eleonore became pregnant.

In fear of the consequences, Höss imprisoned her in one of the camp's prison cells in the hope that she would starve to death. However, Eleonore managed to tell one of the camp's other SS officers about the situation. He let her go free and later blackmailed Höss. Eleonore subsequently had an abortion and was sent to the Dachau camp, which was liberated by the Americans in 1945.

could cultivate. "I assumed that I would be successful in providing better housing for them and feeding them better than in the old camps," Höss wrote.

Working as quickly as possible, the newly appointed commandant set up fences, erected watchtowers and built a crematorium. But he didn't manage to refit the old, damp brick barracks before July 1940 when the first prisoner transports rolled in. Consequently, the inmates were housed in miserable conditions.

The camp commandant's own life was in stark contrast to that of the inmates. Höss and his family moved into a splendid villa just outside the camp perimeter. The house was surrounded by a three-metre-high wall that partially obscured the overcrowded camp on the other side.

"Yes, my family had it good in Auschwitz, every wish that my wife or my children had was fulfilled. The children could live free and easy. My wife had her flower paradise", confessed Höss in his memoirs.

Prisoners ate each other

Outside the family's little paradise, however, life was quite different. Despite Höss' plans for a KZ camp with better conditions than other concentration camps, Auschwitz quickly became notorious for its extreme brutality and the high death rate of inmates. The reason, according to Höss, was that all his time was consumed with the problems of developing Auschwitz, while the prisoners were left to the camp guards, who rarely followed his orders.

"I became bitterly aware that all of my good aspirations and the best of my intentions were ruined by the human shortcomings and stubbornness of most of the officers and men who were assigned to me," he wrote.

Thwarted ambitions or not, Auschwitz expanded massively under Höss's leadership. Several sub-camps shot up into what was rapidly turning into a camp complex filled with a constant influx of new prisoners. After Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, Höss was ordered to build a new camp five kilometres from the original one. Auschwitz II, also known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, was to surpass all other concentration camps in size; it would accommodate a hundred thousand Russian prisoners of war.

The initial idea was to have the prisoners build the camp themselves, but most of them were too starved to work effectively. Even Höss was shocked at their condition. He later wrote: "They died like flies because of their weakened physical condition or from the slightest illness, which their bodies could no longer fight off."

Prisoner numbers were so high that Höss had difficulty providing them with even the bare minimum of nutrition. Hunger made the Soviet prisoners desperate. In several cases, Höss's guards found corpses of Russians who had been killed by their fellow inmates and partially devoured.

At the same time, Höss was given orders to devise a way in which incapacitated prisoners could be executed effectively. According to his memoirs, Höss was distressed by the idea, but an order was an order. After experimenting with the pesticide Zyklon B, Höss converted part of an old crematorium into a gas chamber. In September 1941, 900 Russians were forced into the chamber, after which the poison gas was dropped through from holes in the ceiling.

"As the gas was thrown in some of them yelled 'Gas!' and a tremendous screaming and shoving started toward both doors, but the doors were able to withstand all the force," Höss wrote.

His main concern was not the execution, but that the crematorium furnaces could not keep up with the number of corpses. However, things were about to get far worse.

US HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

In 1942 Auschwitz was transformed into an extermination camp, where thousands of Jewish men, women and children were sent to the gas chambers on a daily basis.

Auschwitz would now kill Jews

The enormous pressures of work made Höss cold and distant in the company of his fellow officers, and often he didn't get home until late at night. However, according to Danuta Rzempiel, one of the housekeepers who visited the villa, he always made time to play with his children:

"At home, Höss was ideal. He loved the children. He liked to lie down with them on the sofa in their room. He kissed them, caressed them, and talked to them in a lovely way. Past the

KZ commandant

NAME: Irmfried Eberl

COMMANDANT OF: Treblinka (July to August 1942)

EDUCATION: Psychiatrist

CAPTURED: Arrested in West Germany in 1948

SENTENCE: None. Committed suicide in prison

c. 300,000 VICTIMS

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threshold of the house he changed totally. He never said a word to me," she said to Piotr Setkiewicz (*The Private Lives of the Auschwitz SS*).

In the summer of 1942, Höss was called to Berlin for a fateful meeting with Himmler, who had a new assignment for him: "All the Jews within our reach must be annihilated during this war. If we do not succeed in destroying the biological foundation of Jewry now, then one day the Jews will destroy the German people," the SS chief declared.

According to Himmler, Auschwitz, with its railway lines to occupied Europe, was the ideal centre for the planned genocide. Soviet prisoners of war, who were originally to have been housed in the newly built camp, had been sent to other camps to work on weapons production. Instead, Höss was ordered to transform Auschwitz-Birkenau into the Nazi's largest extermination camp.

It was a shaken Höss who left Berlin the same day – most of all because he realised how many practical problems Himmler's order entailed. However, he did not question the extermination programme itself.

"At the time I wasted no thoughts about it. I had received an order; I had to carry it out. I could not allow myself to form an opinion as to whether this mass extermination of the Jews was necessary or not," he later wrote.

Instead, the weary commandant took comfort in the fact that his attempts to gas Russian prisoners of war had been successful and that the method could now be used to exterminate the Jews.

Preparations for mass murder

Over the following weeks, Höss worked day and night to prepare Auschwitz-Birkenau for mass murder. A little west of the camp, set among other buildings, two abandoned ▶

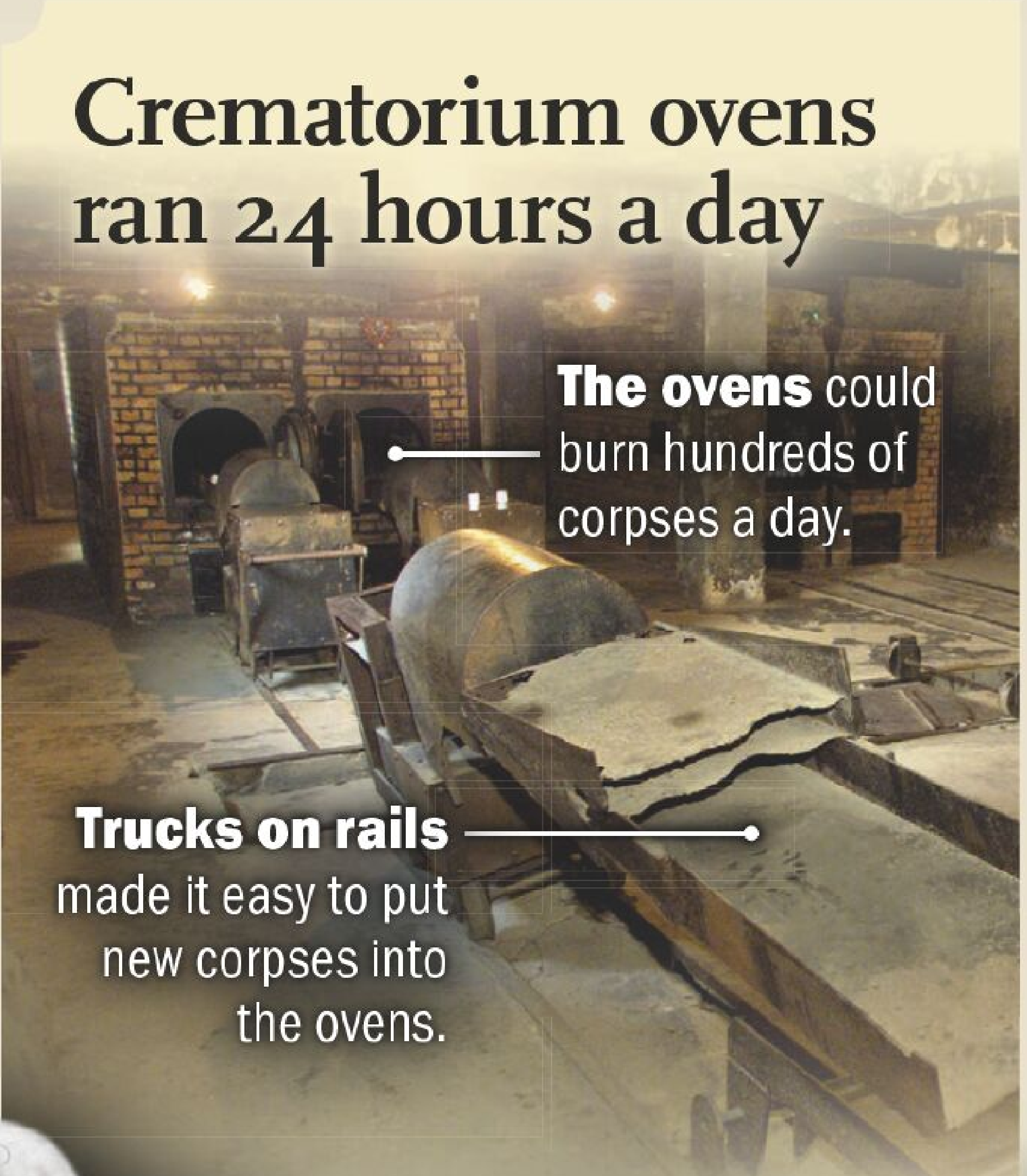
Swamped by corpses

According to Rudolf Höss, it was not difficult to murder thousands of people daily in Auschwitz. The problem was getting rid of the bodies.

Until the autumn of 1942, the majority of Auschwitz's victims were thrown into mass graves, because the crematorium in the original Auschwitz camp could not keep up with the slaughter. But Himmler ordered Höss to erase all trace of the mass killing.

Höss therefore designed an industrial-scale solution.

While overseeing the exhumation and burning of corpses from the mass graves on bonfires, he planned the most efficient killing factories that mankind has ever seen. According to the Nazis' own estimates, the system could burn 4,756 corpses a day. But even their capacity was not enough. As Höss later wrote, "The killing itself took the least time. You could dispose of 2,000 head in half an hour, but it was the burning that took all the time."

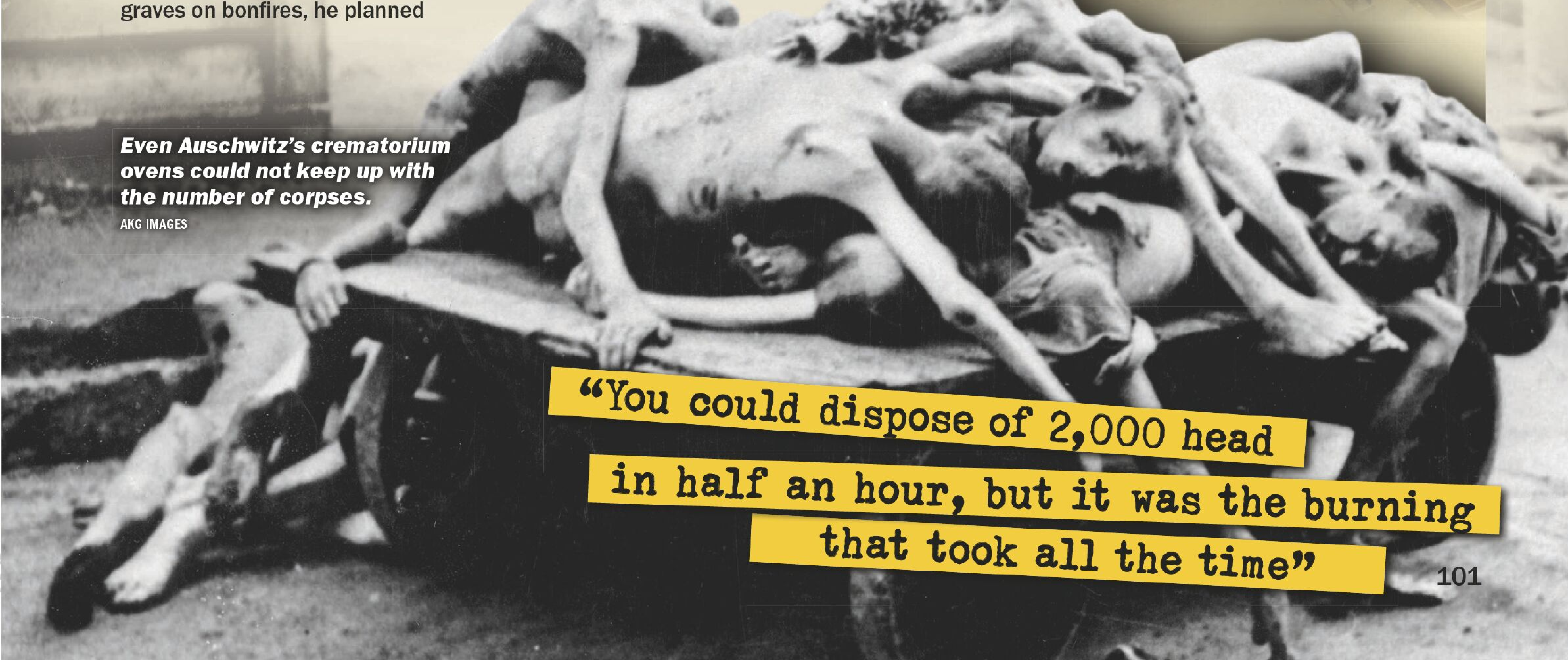


Crematorium ovens ran 24 hours a day

The ovens could burn hundreds of corpses a day.

Trucks on rails made it easy to put new corpses into the ovens.

AFP/SCANPIX



Even Auschwitz's crematorium ovens could not keep up with the number of corpses.

AKG IMAGES

> "You could dispose of 2,000 head in half an hour, but it was the burning that took all the time"

AKG IMAGES

In January 1945, the Germans evacuated Auschwitz and sent 58,000 prisoners to camps in Germany. When the Red Army arrived, only the weakest inmates remained.

farmhouses were converted into gas chambers, the largest of which could accommodate as many as 1,200 people.

The facilities were thus in place when the first train of around a thousand Jewish people rolled in. A group of SS doctors sorted them on arrival: a third, so-called "strong and healthy" Jews, were selected for work, while the remaining 638 were sent directly to the gas chamber. According to Höss, he allowed his staff to write 'Shower' and 'Disinfection' on the doors of the death chambers to reassure the victims.

Getting ready for these 'showers' served another purpose: "The psychology of the undressing phase helped to cow the groups of people," Höss wrote, happy to avoid any unnecessary panic. The gassing started and after 25 minutes the last desperate screams from the chamber ceased. A fan was started, after which special prisoner work units, the Sonderkommando, removed the dead bodies.

Over the following months, thousands of Jews were gassed at an ever-increasing rate. Höss often observed the condemned prisoners, and he was particularly fascinated by the women who were suspicious of what was happening, but still able to remain calm for their children. One day, "[A woman] stepped very close to me and whispered, pointing to her four children, 'How can you murder these beautiful, darling children? Don't you have any heart?'" He later recalled while awaiting trial.

On another occasion, a group of women realised their fate as the guards began to close the gas chamber's doors behind them: "I saw a woman trying to shove her children out of the chamber, crying out, 'Why don't you at least let my precious children live?'" Höss recounted.

In his memoirs, Höss acknowledged that the experiences shook him; however, he never showed it: "I had to appear cold and heartless during these events which tear the heart apart in anyone who had any kind of human feelings."

Roasted meat could be smelled everywhere

At home in his villa, however, Höss could no longer mask his dejection, particularly when the fortunes of war turned. He

Executioners were ordinary people

When Rudolf Höss was arrested people believed he must be a monster who enjoyed killing. However, research suggests only a select few SS people worked in the camps for that reason. Their main motivations were typically:

Obedience and peer pressure

The SS staff in Auschwitz were ardent Nazis indoctrinated to carry out any order without asking questions. But many also felt that, for the sake of their colleagues, they had a duty to endure the atrocities.

Anti-Semitism

Contempt and hated for Jews was prevalent among the SS and many were trained to see the Jews as a dangerous enemies who desired world domination and the destruction of the Aryan race.

Security

Although the work of killing thousands of innocent people on a daily basis was undoubtedly psychologically distressing to many SS people, it was also safe. The risk of dying as a guard in an extermination camp was minimal compared to fighting as a soldier on the Eastern Front, for example.

Photos from Auschwitz reveal that, despite their work, SS guards were often amused and relaxed.
US HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

YALE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Test showed anyone can be a monster

In 1961, US psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted an obedience experiment to show how far an authority figure could push people. Subjects participated in a test to show whether punishment helped in learning. Whenever a 'student' (actually an actor), answered a question incorrectly, the subject was told to give him a more powerful electric shock. 65 percent of subjects could be pressured into giving the maximum charge, despite the student's 'screams'.

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION & ARCHIVE RESEARCH TEAM

KZ commandant

NAME: Gottlieb Hering

COMMANDANT OF: Belzec camp

EDUCATION: Police officer

CAPTURED: Hering died of illness in October 1945 before the Allies could catch him

SENTENCE: None

c. 200,000 VICTIMS

isolated himself more and more from his wife, Hedwig, but still found time to play with his children and occasionally take them for a walk along the nearby river.

In autumn 1942, Himmler ordered that there must be no evidence left of the Nazis' mass executions. In Auschwitz, this meant that 107,000 corpses that had previously been thrown into mass graves outside the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp had to be dug up and cremated in the open. For months huge bonfires burned near the camp.

"During bad weather or when a strong wind was blowing, the stench of burning flesh was carried for many miles and caused the entire area to talk about the burning of Jews, despite official counter-propaganda," wrote Höss, who oversaw the macabre task.

"For hours I had to stand in the horrible, haunting stench while the mass graves were dug open, and the bodies were dragged out and burned."

However, the number of Jewish transports into the camp didn't diminish, and Höss had to commission four new, state-of-the-art crematoriums, which were built by the Jewish slave labourers. In the new buildings, the whole murderous process was to be carried out under one roof with special rooms for undressing and gassing, with direct access to the huge crematorium furnaces. The mass murder had now been completely industrialised. Hundreds of thousands of human beings walked in, but nothing but smoke and ash came out.

Inspector of the KZ camps

By 1943, Auschwitz had become a death factory; Höss's work was complete. In the winter, he was offered the position of head of the central administration of the camps which, after some hesitation, he accepted. Höss's new office was just outside Berlin, but at his own request, his family stayed in the villa.

From the sidelines, Höss was able to keep abreast of the activities at Auschwitz. In the spring of 1944, he coordinated the transport of Hungarian Jews to the camp, where they were murdered with shocking efficiency. In just eight weeks the new camp commandant, under Höss's supervision, managed to gas 320,000 Jews.

The speed at which they were killed proved Höss's organisational talent and marked the fastest 'processing' rate at Auschwitz. By autumn 1944, it was clear the Nazis would lose the war, and Himmler ordered an end to the gassing at Auschwitz. In January 1945, the Germans evacuated the camp. It was liberated by the Red Army shortly afterwards.

After a year on the run, in March 1946 Rudolf Höss was captured by British soldiers near the village of Gottrupel, near Flensburg on the Danish border, where he was working on a farm under the name of Franz Lang. At first, he refused to reveal his true identity, but after a beating, the mass murderer eventually confessed.

Höss surprised everyone

During the ensuing trial, Rudolf Höss apologised to his wife, the church, the Polish nation and anybody else who would listen. Those who interrogated him expected to see a monster but instead met a man who seemed calm and perfectly normal.

Bernard Clarke, the officer who censored Höss's letters to his family noted that Höss apparently contained two very different persons: "One was brutal with no regard for human life. The other was soft and affectionate."

Gustave Gilbert, the American military psychologist who interrogated Höss after the war, wrote: "In all of the discussions, Höss is quite matter-of-fact and apathetic, shows some belated interest in the enormity of his crime, but gives the impression that it never would have occurred to him if somebody hadn't asked him."

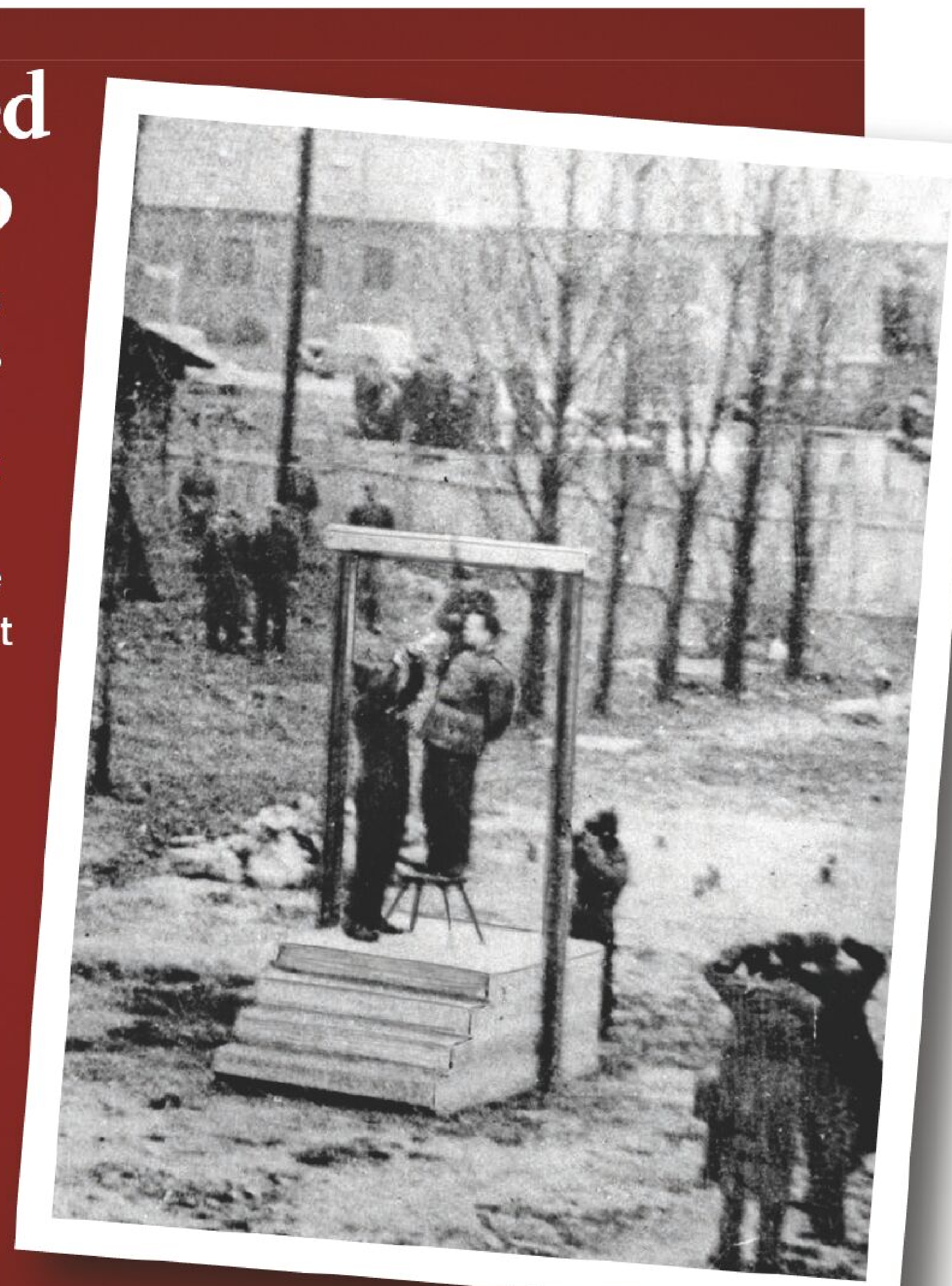
On 16th April 1947, Commandant Rudolf Höss was hanged at Auschwitz – he was the last person executed at the camp. It's possible that as he prepared to meet his end where he himself had murdered over a million people, he was thinking about the letter he had written to his wife shortly before being led to his place of execution. In it, the former camp commandant wrote:

"It is tragic that, although I was by nature gentle, good-natured, and very helpful, I became the greatest destroyer of human beings who carried out every order to exterminate people no matter what."

Höss was hanged in his own camp

After his capture, Rudolf Höss was extradited to the Polish authorities who sentenced him to death. In a letter to his children, he wrote that they should always remember to be critical and learn from life: "The biggest mistake of my life was that I believed everything faithfully which came from the top."

In April 1947, Höss was driven to Auschwitz, where the Poles had built a gallows near the villa where he had lived. His last request was a cup of coffee.



DPA/POLFOTO

Rudolf Höss apologised to the Polish people before being hanged.

Death in Auschwitz

PRISONERS WERE SUBJECTS OF EVIL EXPERIMENTS

Some prisoners at Auschwitz managed to avoid the gas chamber, but surviving was perhaps a worse fate – especially for those chosen as lab rats by a twisted doctor intent on furthering 'science' at any cost.

Some of the Jewish newcomers at Auschwitz were kept alive for work or other reasons, the rest were sent directly to the gas chambers.

Auschwitz, 1943

THE STAGE IS SET

Hundreds of thousands of people have already been killed in Auschwitz when a young doctor with a background in 'race sciences' arrives at the camp in 1943. The man quickly realizes that Auschwitz offers a unique opportunity to test extreme medical theories on live human subjects. The doctor's name is Josef Mengele.

POLAND
AUSCHWITZ

THE MAN IN SS UNIFORM stood in shiny, polished riding boots with his feet slightly apart. One thumb rested in his pistol belt, in the other hand he held a cane. Frightened prisoners were brought forward one at a time, and each time he decided their fate with a flick of the stick: strong and able prisoners to the right; the weak to the left.

The next pair of prisoners stepped forward, clutching one another in fear. The SS officer's cold expression suddenly warmed with a smile. He crouched before the twin girls. With a gentle finger, he stroked one of the sisters on the cheek asking if they would like some cupcakes. The girls nodded warily. The officer clicked his fingers and a guard ushered the twins away from the two lines.

The camp doctor returned to sorting Auschwitz's new arrivals: left, left, right, left... A few hours later, most of the newcomers were dead. The few who had been sent to the right would live a few weeks longer as slave labourers at the camp.

Meanwhile, in the camp's private laboratory, the twin girls had been strapped to operating tables. A medical coat now covered Josef Mengele's SS uniform and the smile was gone. He picked up a scalpel. The experiment was about to begin.

As a child, Josef Mengele dreamed of earning a place in the history books. His upbringing in Bavaria – as the oldest child of wealthy Catholic parents – was marked by competition and the struggle for parental recognition. In his diaries, Mengele described both his father and mother as being emotionally austere, and his relationship with his two brothers was tainted by jealousy. His childhood friend, Julius Diesbach, described him as a fiercely ambitious young man:

"He didn't just want to succeed but to stand out from the crowd. It was his passion for fame. He once told me that one day I would read his name in the encyclopaedia."

Auschwitz was established in 1940 and used mainly for political prisoners. From 1942, the site became an extermination camp. Several sub-camps were built prior to 1944.

TAKING SIDES

Mengele decided that this recognition would come through a fine education and a well-paid job as a doctor. After graduating in 1930, therefore, he decided to study medicine with an emphasis on anthropology and human genetics at the University of Munich.

"My family will be very impressed when I become the first Mengele scientist", Joseph wrote to a friend.

The time spent in Munich was not spent only on studies. In the early 1930s, the city was buzzing with political turmoil. The Nazis were on the rise, and Mengele was intrigued by their ideology.

"It was impossible to stand on the sidelines in these politically stirring times," he later wrote, claiming that it was key that "our Fatherland not succumb to the Marxist-Bolshevik attack".

At university, Mengele was becoming more interested in studying racial development

FROM GERMANY TO BRAZIL

MENGELE HAD GREAT AMBITIONS

1911

16TH MARCH
Josef 'Beppo' Mengele is born in Günzburg. His parents, Walburga and Karl, own a successful factory. Along with his younger brothers, Karl and Alois, he is raised in a strict Catholic household.

1931

Mengele joins Stahlhelm, a far-right paramilitary organisation, which dissolved in 1935.

1935

Mengele submits his doctorate thesis on racial characteristics.

Otmar von Verschuer (right) becomes Mengele's mentor and, like him, is intrigued by research on twins.

1937

1ST JANUARY
Mengele becomes a research assistant at the Third Reich Institute for Heredity, Biology and Racial Purity in Frankfurt.

MAY
Mengele joins the Nazi Party. His number is 5,574,974.

Around 500,000 first-class Iron Crosses were awarded.

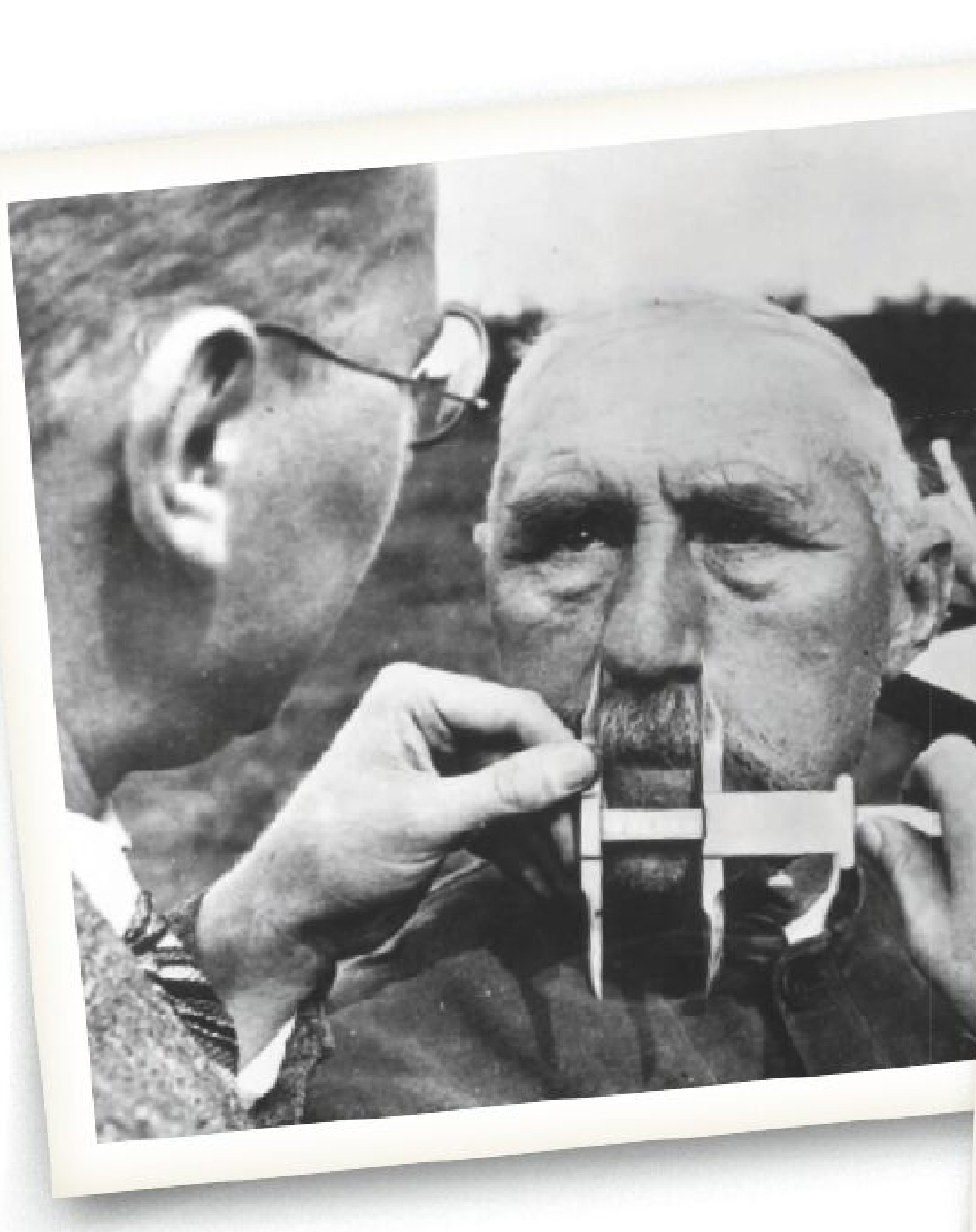
1942

JANUARY
As an SS officer, Mengele receives the Iron Cross for bravery after rescuing two soldiers from a burning tank.

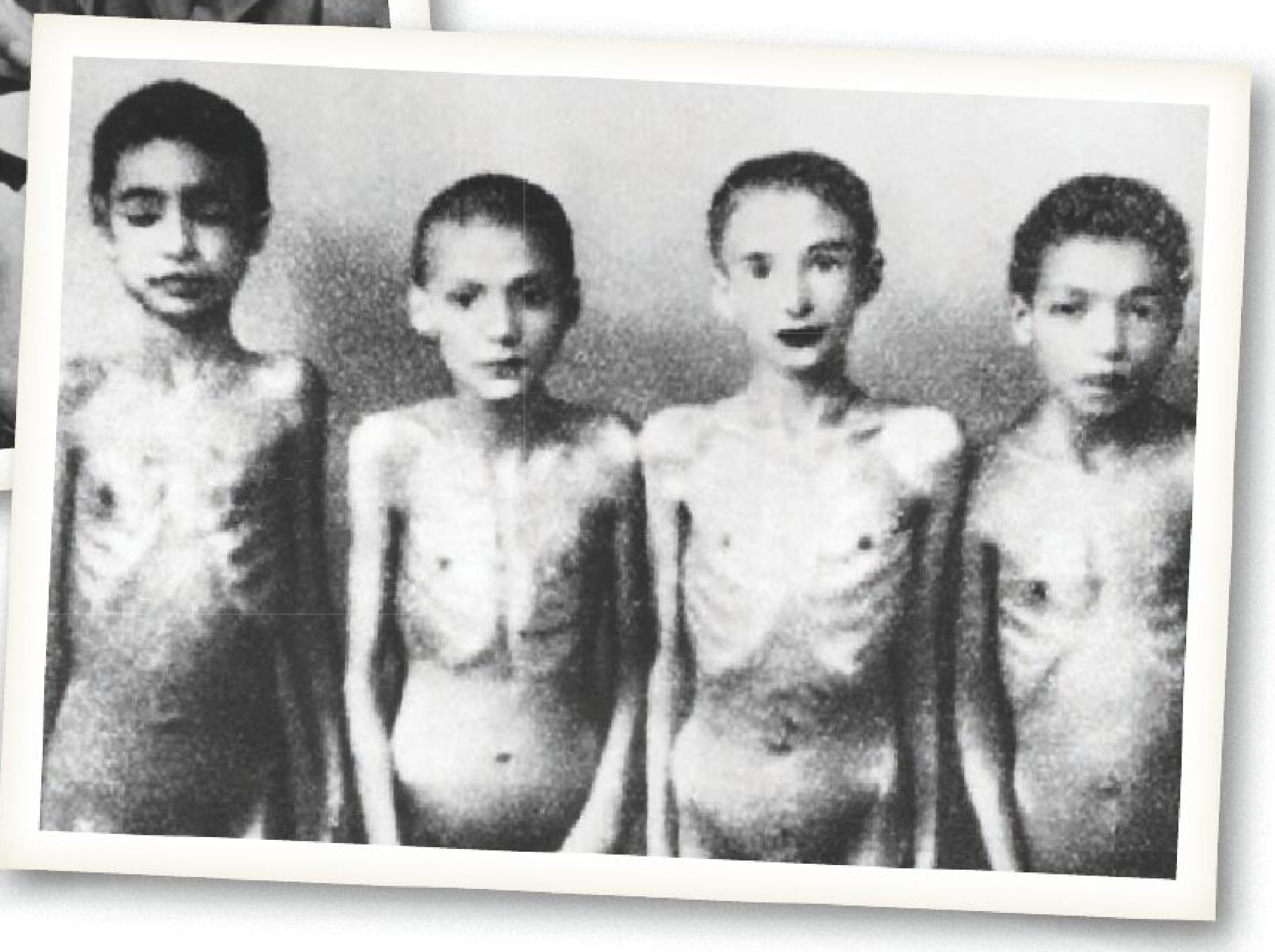
than curing diseases. German medical courses at the time were premised on Social Darwinist theories that justified the notion of racial superiority, and which were used by the Nazis to support their belief in the supremacy of the Aryan race. Mengele unreservedly embraced these theories.

In Munich, he studied under several of Germany's foremost authorities in the field. One of the researchers was Theodor Mollison, who claimed to be able to determine if a person had Jewish ancestry simply by looking at a photograph of them.

In 1935, Mollison made Mengele's long-standing dream of an academic career possible by awarding him a doctorate for his thesis entitled 'Racial Morphological Research on the Lower Jaw Section of Four Racial Groups'.



Nose measurements were believed to show how Aryans differed from Jews.



When the Soviets reached Auschwitz in 1945, they found starving children.

NAZI INFLUENCES

The doctorate paved the way for a job. In 1937, Mengele was hired in a research post at the Third Reich Institute for Heredity, Biology and Racial Purity at the University of Frankfurt. Here, he learned from one of Germany's leading race theorists, Professor Otmar von Verschuer, who did not hide his political opinions, hailing Adolf Hitler as "the first statesman to recognise hereditary biology and race hygiene".

It was around this time that Mengele applied for membership of the Nazi Party. He joined the SS and, with Verschuer's support, he quickly rose through the ranks of Nazi party academics.

Verschuer spoke of Mengele as a man with "a keen interest in medical research and surgery... [who] was also intelligent and cultured". German historian Andreas Hillgruber described Mengele quite differently: "He was convinced he served a great cause, an attempt by Hitler to prevent mankind self-destructing...Mengele had become the embodiment of Nazism in its most extreme form."

Mengele saw Auschwitz as a gigantic lab, with its inmates as his subjects.

Josef Mengele

DOCTOR ENJOYED PLAYING GOD

Mengele was transferred to Auschwitz in the summer of 1943. Before that, he had fought on the Eastern Front where he received the Iron Cross for bravery.

As a war hero, Mengele was accorded respect by his new colleagues, but they soon noticed he was different. Mengele was a workaholic, never shirking even the most unpleasant duties, and was always taking on additional projects and responsibilities. Plus, he hardly ever drank alcohol – even when it was his turn to make the selection at the railhead. This was the sorting process that ensued every time a new train arrived crowded with prisoners. Camp doctors had to ▶

1943

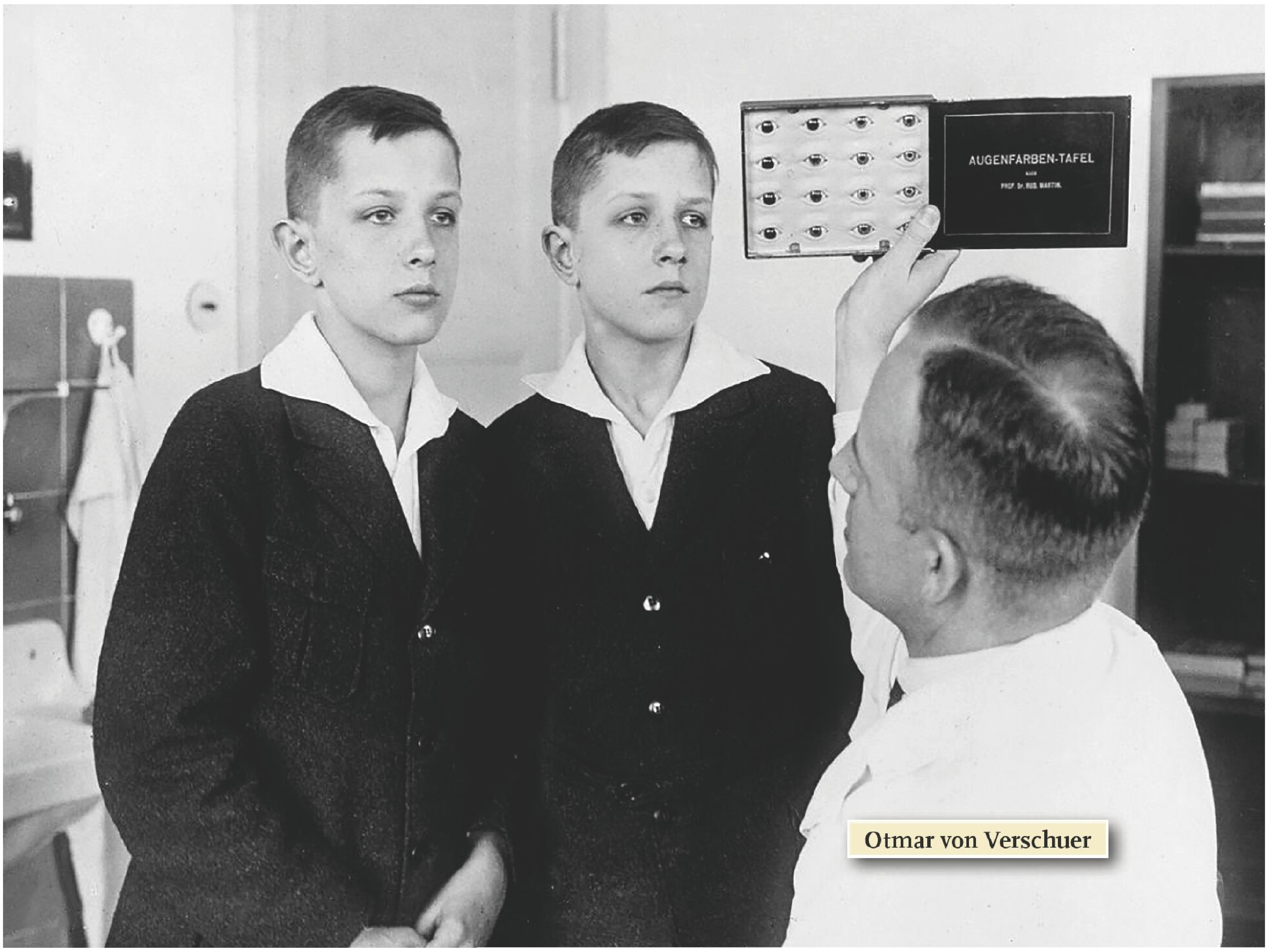
MAY
Mengele arrives at Auschwitz as a camp doctor. The ambitious medical man immediately begins to experiment on the camp's prisoners, especially the Jews. Mengele is particularly interested in twins and people with physical disabilities. Hundreds die in his tests.

1945

17TH JANUARY
Mengele flees Auschwitz. For the next three years, he works on a farm under a false name.

1949

JULY
With the help of a Nazi underground network, the doctor flees to Argentina.



Otmar von Verschuer

Otmar von Verschuer was a leading name in German race research before and during the war. Like Josef Mengele, von Verschuer examined twins to determine how diseases and 'criminal proclivities' emerged and were inherited through generations.

evaluate which prisoners were fit to live and which should be sent to the gas chamber. The task was extremely unpopular: most doctors anaesthetised themselves with morphine, ether and alcohol in order to cope with their roles as lords of life and death. But not Mengele. He often volunteered and eagerly performed the selection, even playing classical music while he sorted out which prisoners would live and which would die. He often darted in among the crowds of prisoners to pick out particular individuals, who were immediately sent to the camp's well-equipped laboratory. Mengele even showed up on his days off to make sure that he didn't miss out on anyone he thought worthy of study. The doctor was still driven by a burning ambition to be recognised.

"I would say he was moderately gifted," one of Mengele's university professors had said, damning him with faint praise. "I saw two of his publications before the war and there was

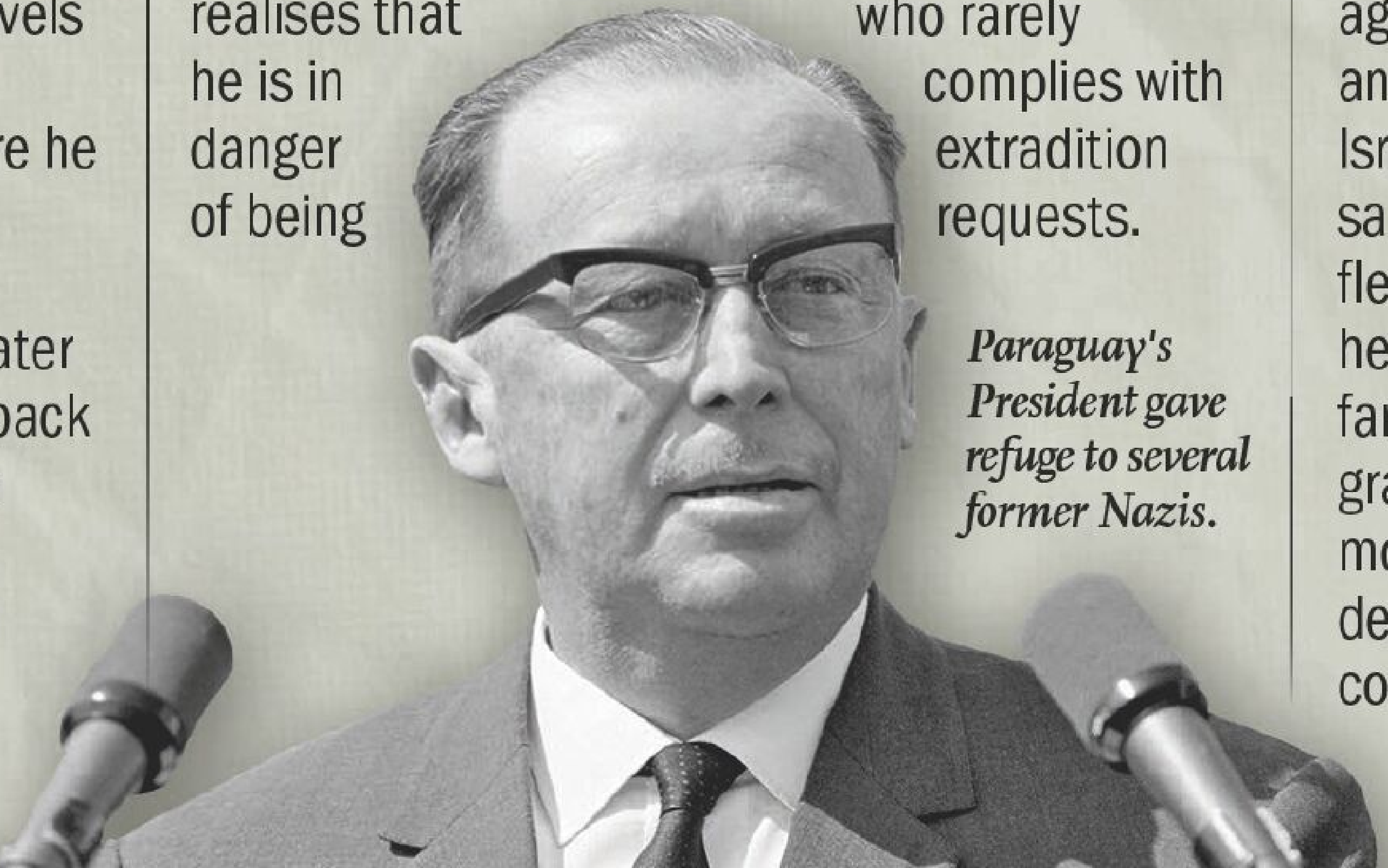
1954

Mengele is divorced from his wife, Irene, who does not go to South America. Two years later, he travels to Germany via Switzerland, where he meets his late brother's wife, Martha. Martha later follows Mengele back to South America with her son. The couple marries in 1958 in Uruguay.

1959

SUMMER

A former prisoner tracks Mengele to Argentina. The doctor realises that he is in danger of being extradited from Argentina to West Germany and moves to Paraguay, which is ruled by dictator Alfredo Stroessner, who rarely complies with extradition requests.



Paraguay's President gave refuge to several former Nazis.

1960

11TH MAY

Top Nazi Adolf Eichmann is kidnapped by Israeli agents in Argentina and brought to trial in Israel. Fearing the same fate, Mengele flees to Brazil where he gets a job on a farm. Mengele is gradually becoming more paranoid and depressed. He contemplates suicide.

In his last days, Josef Mengele lived in a small, dirty shack in Brazil.

1975

Mengele moves into a small shack in a poor suburb of São Paulo, where he sinks into a lonely life. His health is failing and in 1976, he has a stroke.

1979

7TH FEBRUARY

Mengele is visiting friends in the south of São Paulo, where he dies of a heart attack while swimming. In 1985, a skeleton was found, which Brazilian police believed to be Mengele. In 1992, police DNA tests conclusively confirm the body's identity: Auschwitz's Angel of Death is no more.

certainly nothing brilliant about them. I thought he might make a professor in about twenty years." But the medic wasn't prepared to wait that long – he wanted to show his parents and the rest of his family that he could achieve great results now through his experimental work on race.

Mengele spent almost all of his spare time at the concentration camp in his laboratory, examining selected prisoners. Auschwitz turned out to be a land of plenty for the ambitious doctor: here he had unlimited access to research material. Often Mengele sat up until late into the night – busy writing reports or staring into his microscope.

TWINS COULD CONQUER THE WORLD

Mengele usually picked people with physical disabilities and disorders for his tests. His goal was to investigate how such deformities occurred in the hope that they could be purged over time. In his mind, this was necessary to keep the Aryan race pure and strong.

Mengele was at his most animated when the newly arrived boxcars contained twins. The doctor believed that twins held the answer to a new German world order. By studying and experimenting on twins, he hoped to discover a method to induce twin births in German women, thereby rapidly increasing the number of Aryans on the planet.

Mengele was also fascinated by the fact that one twin could be strong and well-proportioned, while the other was weak and deformed. He tried to find out why by swapping the siblings' blood, both with their own twin and those from other families. At other times, Mengele went even further, as former-prisoner Vera Alexander testified:

"SS men came and took two children away... One of them was hunchback. Two or three days later, an SS man brought them back in a terrible state. They had been cut. The hunchback was sewn to the other child, back to back, their wrists back to back, too. There was a terrible smell of gangrene."

Mengele also believed that blue eyes could be artificially induced. He performed numerous experiments to change the pigmentation of his victims' irises. Once, he sent for 36 children from one of the barracks. The children had coloured dye injected into their brown eyes. The result was painful infections with many losing their sight. The experiment was a failure, so Mengele ordered the children gassed.

For 34 years
Josef Mengele lived under various aliases, such as Fritz Ullman, Dr Fausto Rindón, Gregor Helmut and S Josi Alvers Aspiazu. The Nazi doctor was never caught.

The Jewish doctor, Vexler Jancu, recalled seeing the result of the experiment:

"In June 1943 I went to the Gypsy camp in Birkenau. I saw a wooden table. On it were samples of eyes. They each had a number and a letter. The eyes were very pale yellow to bright blue, green and violet."

The prisoner Vera Kriegel had a similar experience when one day she found an entire wall covered in eyes in Mengele's private laboratory. "They were pinned up like butterflies... I thought I was dead and already living in hell."

BONES WERE COOKED CLEAN

No one tried to stop the experiments. On the contrary, several medical authorities encouraged him as long as the tests furthered Nazi racial doctrine. Mengele, for his part, was happy to give long lectures about his intentions and achievements to colleagues at Auschwitz.

NAME **OTMAR VON VERSCHUER**

TITLE BIOLOGIST AND GENETICIST

1896-1969

Race theorist avoided punishment

Although Otmar von Verschuer probably knew about and welcomed Josef Mengele's macabre experiments at Auschwitz, the biologist managed to avoid punishment after the war. Von Verschuer was indicted, but the evidence was destroyed – possibly by himself.

Von Verschuer succeeded in being rehabilitated and became chairman of the German Anthropological Association in 1952.

- **Was a professor in Frankfurt.**
- **Died in a car accident.**

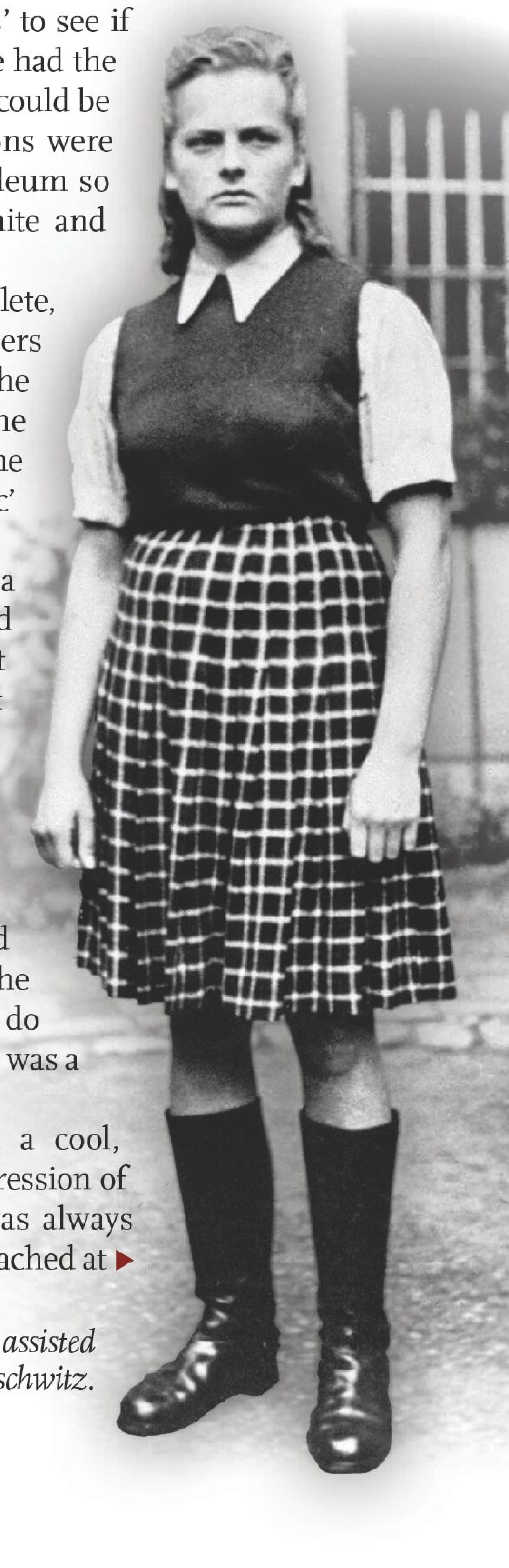
One day, Mengele found a father and son among the prisoners. The father had a pronounced curvature of the spine, while his son had a deformed foot. Mengele felt compelled to examine these 'specimens' to see if they shared any other abnormalities. He had the pair shot, then boiled so that their flesh could be stripped from their bones. The skeletons were then put in a bath of petroleum so that the bones became white and odourless.

Once the work was complete, Mengele led the SS officers around the skeletons, while he pompously pointed out the deformities and explained the significance of his 'scientific' investigations.

The prisoner Alex Dekel, a Romanian Jew, witnessed Mengele operating on patients without anaesthesia. In one such case, he cut away sections of a patient's stomach and on another, he removed a patient's heart while he was still alive, but the doctor was never called to account:

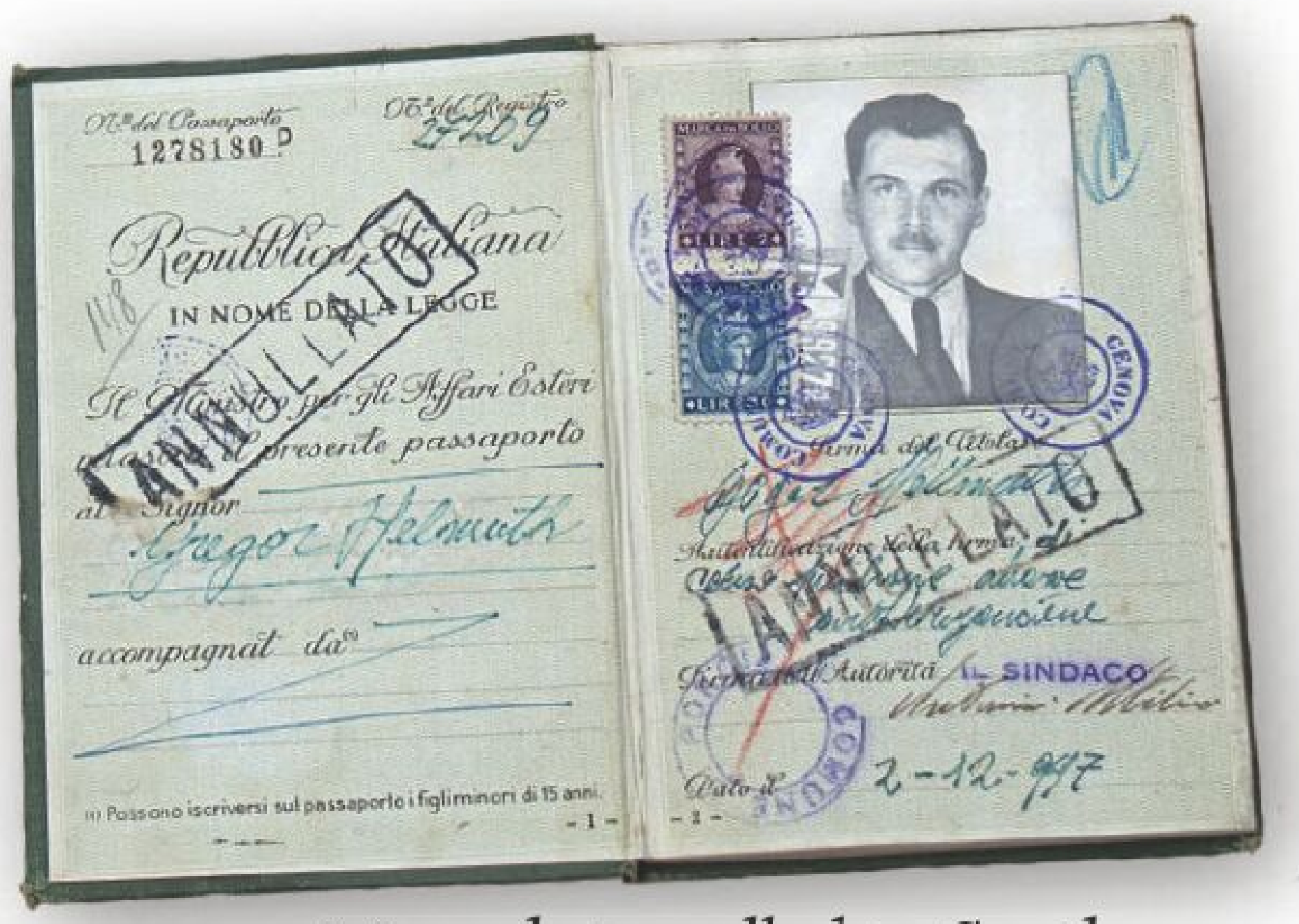
"Mengele ran a butcher shop... nobody ever questioned him – why did this one die? Why did that one perish? The patients did not count. He professed to do what he did in the name of science, but it was a madness."

Mengele always tried to maintain a cool, demeanour – he wanted to give the impression of being a scientist, not a torturer. He was always immaculately dressed and remained detached at ▸



Female camp guards like Irma Grese assisted Josef Mengele in Auschwitz.

Mengele mixed with other physicians and officers at Auschwitz but usually remained detached at parties. He liked to give the impression of being a hard-working scientist who refrained from excess and alcohol.



N.º del Passaporto 1278180 P

Repubblica Italiana

IN NOME DELLA LEGGE

Il Ministro per gli Affari Esteri

il presente passaporto

al Signor

Gregor Helmuth

accompagnat da

(1) Possono iscriversi sul passaporto i figli minori di 15 anni.

ANNULLATO

Firma del titolare

IL SINDACO

Data 2-12-947

Mengele travelled to South America in 1949 with papers in the name of Helmut Gregor.

social events. But sometimes the mask slipped. Camp physician Gisella Perl witnessed Mengele's explosive temper when he was faced with a female prisoner who had escaped the gas chamber six times:

"He grabbed her by the neck and proceeded to beat her head to a bloody pulp... screaming at her... 'You want to escape, don't you? You can't escape now... You are going to burn like the others... you dirty Jew!'... I saw her two beautiful, intelligent eyes disappear under a layer of blood. Her ears weren't there any longer... her straight, pointed nose was a flat, broken, bleeding mass."

Mengele's sadism wasn't confined to his laboratory, nor his brutality to moments of anger. Annani Silovich Pet'ko, a Russian prisoner, described how one day a large pit filled with flaming gasoline was prepared at the camp. According to her account, shortly afterwards, around ten dumper lorries arrived carrying around 300 children. They were escorted by SS officers; Mengele was with them. One by one, the lorries backed up to the pit and tipped the children into the flames.

"The children started to scream; some of them managed to crawl out of the burning pit; an officer walked around it with sticks and pushed back those who managed to get out. Höss [commandant of Auschwitz] and Mengele were present and were giving orders."

EXPERIMENTS CONTINUED TO THE LAST

By Autumn 1944, everyone knew that Germany was losing the war. Mengele became increasingly depressed. He paced around his office with his face buried in his hands. But the experiments continued to the last. In December 1944, Mengele performed a series of experiments on 16 women with dwarfism. Only five survived.

1.1 million

people are believed to have died at Auschwitz-Birkenau. When the Soviets arrived in January 1945, the soldiers found only a few thousand survivors.

Day by day, the Red Army moved closer and Mengele realised that he had to leave. He was last seen by prisoner Martina Puzyna, who later revealed all the details of the experiments carried out on twins. On 17th January 1945, Mengele entered her office.

"He took all my papers, put them into two boxes, and had them taken outside to a waiting car", Puzyna recalled. The doctor never spoke a word.

Auschwitz's Angel of Death was finally gone, but he had made sure that his name would live on in the history books. ■

Holocaust deniers' lies

The mass murder of Jews and Josef Mengele's evil experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz are still frequently denied by neo-Nazis and other anti-Semites. However, their oft-repeated arguments are easily refuted with documentation and scientific fact.

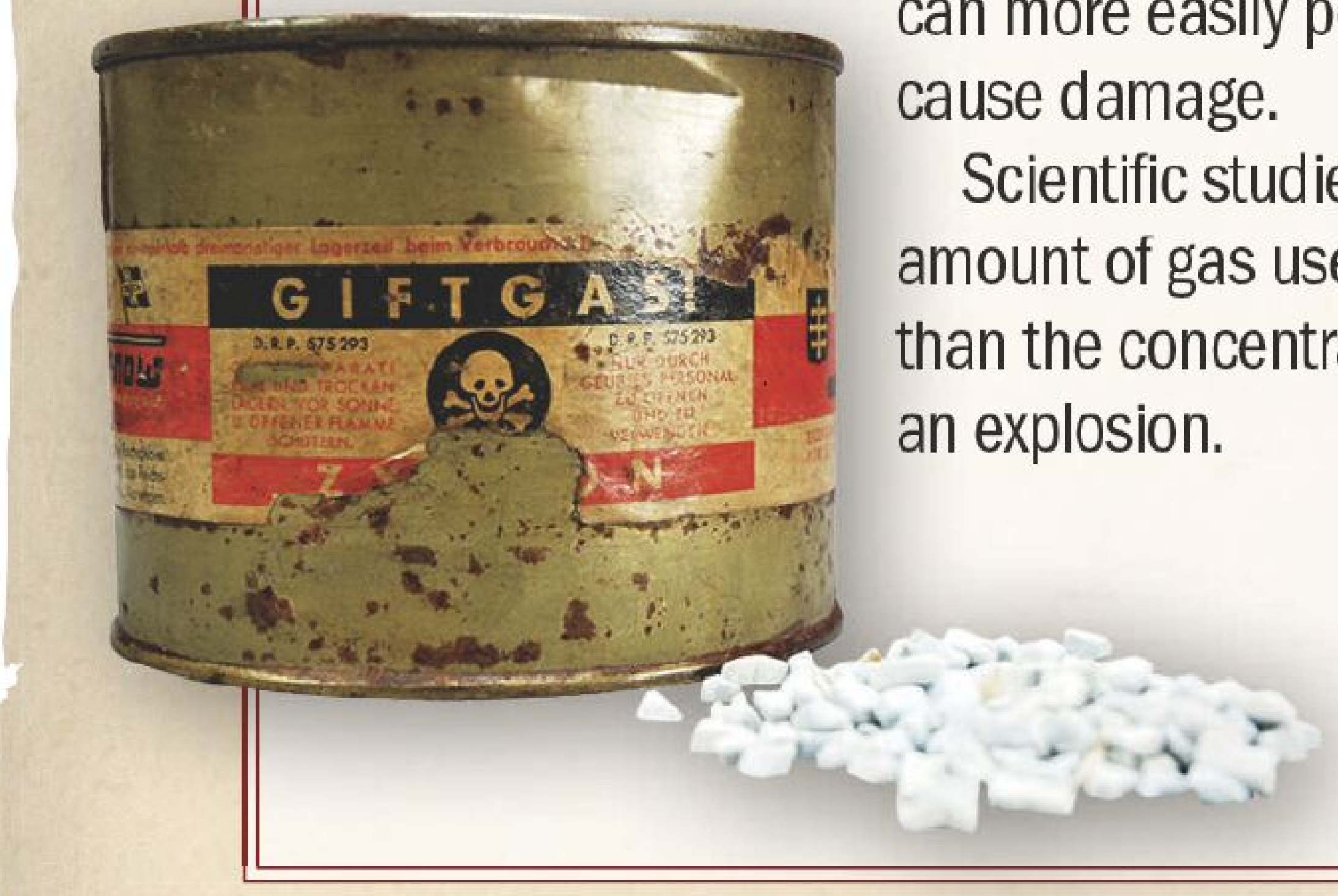
The gas was ineffective

CLAIM: Zyklon B is a pesticide that is not suitable for killing humans. In addition, the use of this gas in combination with heat from the crematorium furnaces would have caused explosions.

FACT

The eerie truth is that Zyklon B is actually more effective on humans than on pests. Humans are warm-blooded as opposed to insects, which is why the toxins in the gas can more easily penetrate human bodies and cause damage.

Scientific studies also show that the amount of gas used was 200 times lower than the concentration levels needed to cause an explosion.



Zyklon B was used for pest control in the concentration camps and was easy to obtain.

The death toll at the concentration camps was greatly exaggerated

CLAIM: The number of Jews killed in the Holocaust can be no more than 200,000-300,000. The concentration camps did not have the capacity to kill more than that, and most prisoners died of natural causes.

FACT

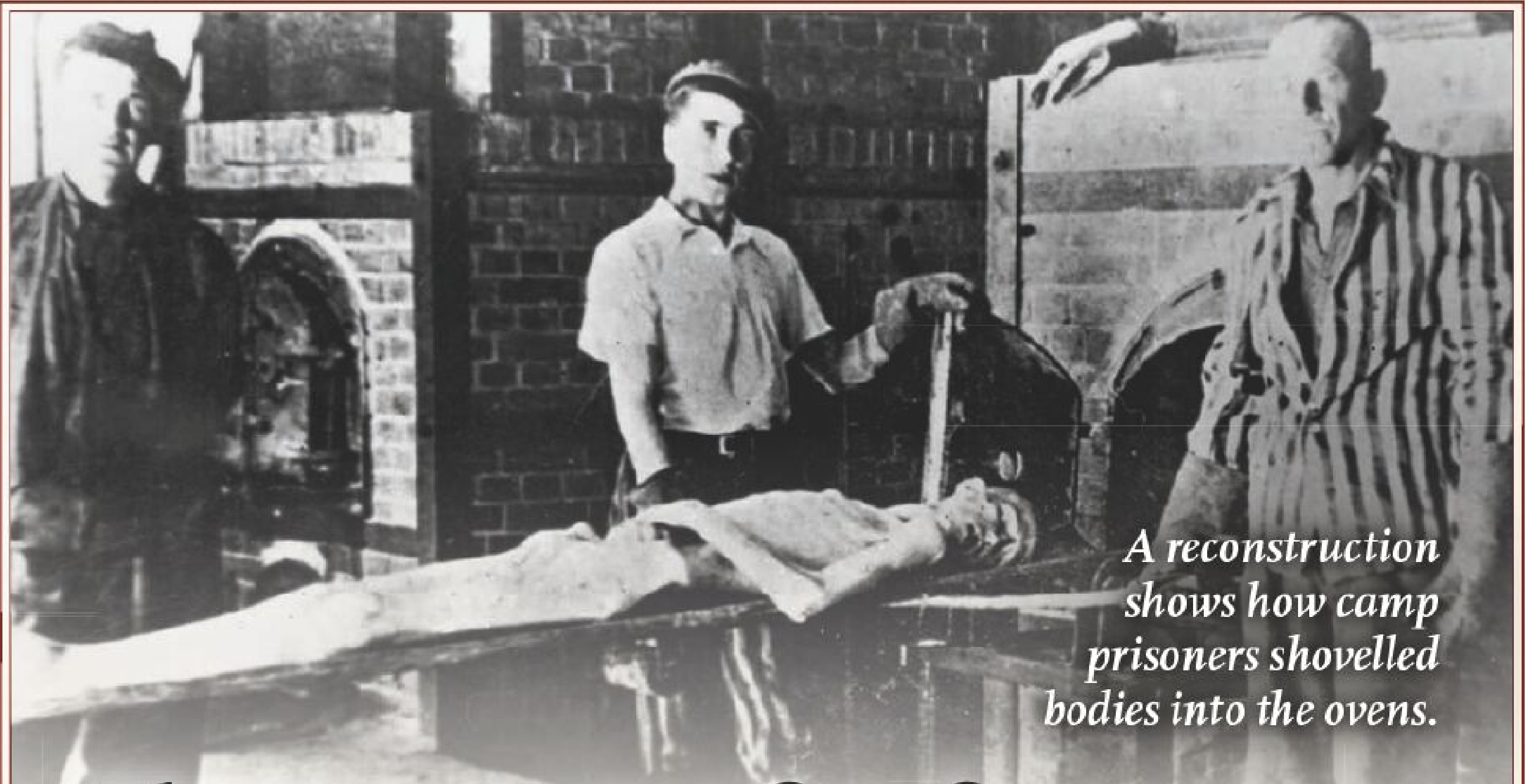
Comparisons of censuses before and after the war prove that around six million Jews disappeared during the Holocaust. There were approximately 3,250,000 Jews living in Poland alone in the 1930s and only 350,000 after the war. The genocide has also been confirmed by many eyewitnesses. The number of belongings – including clothing, jewellery, suitcases, glasses and gold teeth and fillings – taken from those people provides further evidence of the genocide.

No proof of experiments

CLAIM: Josef Mengele's medical experiments never took place. No photos of the experiments exist and it would irrational for the Nazis to allow doctors to spend time examining 'inferior races'.

FACT

Several eyewitnesses confirm that Mengele and other doctors conducted experiments on live prisoners. Furthermore, some photographic evidence of the experiments has been found.



A reconstruction shows how camp prisoners shovelled bodies into the ovens.

There were too few furnaces

CLAIM: It takes an hour to incinerate a body, meaning the Nazis could not have burned 1.1 million people at Auschwitz.

FACT

The Holocaust deniers' calculation refers to ordinary crematoria, where the furnaces are shut down after each burn so that the ashes can be recovered. But the Nazis used industrial firing. Also, workers at Auschwitz were ordered to crush the torsos of the corpses with iron bars to reduce the cremation time.

Photographic evidence that shows the crematoria at Auschwitz

Reinhard Heydrich

HITLER'S ARYAN EXECUTIONER

He was the grandson of an opera composer and rose to become Hitler's favourite. The Aryan fencing virtuoso Reinhard Heydrich coldly crushed his rivals and eradicated any resistance to Nazism. At the peak of his career, he masterminded the extermination of Europe's Jews. It was to become his shameful legacy.

For 11 years, Reinhard Tristan Eugen Heydrich exterminated Jews and political opponents alike with unsettling efficiency.

POLFOTO/ULLSTEIN BILD & BPK

AF THOMAS HEBSGAARD

The baking May sun shone down on Jozef Gabcík. For more than an hour, the 30-year-old Czechoslovakian had waited impatiently at a tram stop in the Prague district of Liben. Sweat glistened on his forehead, evidence of the morning's searing heat. Despite this, he stood with a raincoat draped over his arm. Under it, Gabcík had hidden a submachine gun.

The British Sten Mk II FF 209 would be used to kill the head of the Reich Main Security Office, Reinhard Heydrich. For the past year, the hated Nazi had ruled Bohemia and Moravia – today's Czech Republic – with cynical brutality. Now, he was going to die.

On the opposite pavement, 28-year-old Jan Kubiš leaned against a lamppost. In his hand, he carried a suitcase containing two bombs. For the two men, there was nothing else to do but wait. Sooner or later, Heydrich's black Mercedes 320 Convertible B had to show up; according to reliable intelligence, Hitler's henchman would drive past the two men at some point that morning.

Reinhard Tristan Eugen Heydrich was at the peak of his Nazi career. As deputy commander of the SS and chief of the SD intelligence services and Gestapo secret police, the 38-year-old Heydrich had played a key role in the upper echelons of the Third Reich for ten years. At the same time, he was the de facto sole ruler in Bohemia and Moravia, where he installed himself in the old royal castle overlooking Prague.

At 10.30 on 27th May 1942, Gabcík and Kubiš' plan suddenly kicked into action. A flicker of light flashed in the eyes of the two partisans. It was the long-awaited signal, passed on from lookout Josef Valcík who'd been keeping watch for Heydrich for the past hour.

Gabcík sprinted across the street to Kubiš, just as a tram stopped to unload passengers. At that moment, a black Mercedes convertible with the registration plate SS-3 came into view. To the relief of the conspirators, only the driver and the tall, blond Heydrich were in the car. Heydrich sat quietly in the back, completely oblivious to his fate.

The sharp bend on which the partisans had positioned themselves forced Heydrich's driver to slow down. As the car came within three metres of Gabcík, the Czech dropped his raincoat, exposing his Sten gun, and squeezed the trigger. But to his dismay, nothing happened. The weapon was jammed with grass Gabcík that had been keeping in the coat's pocket to feed his rabbits.

While the Czech fumbled anxiously with his weapon, Reinhard Heydrich ordered his driver to stop. Without fear or hesitation, he rose from the back seat of the open car, pulled out his gun and aimed directly at the would-be assassin. The Gestapo boss pressed the trigger, but, as with Gabcík's attempt, nothing happened. A hollow click rang out – the gun was empty.

HEYDRICH
HIMMLER

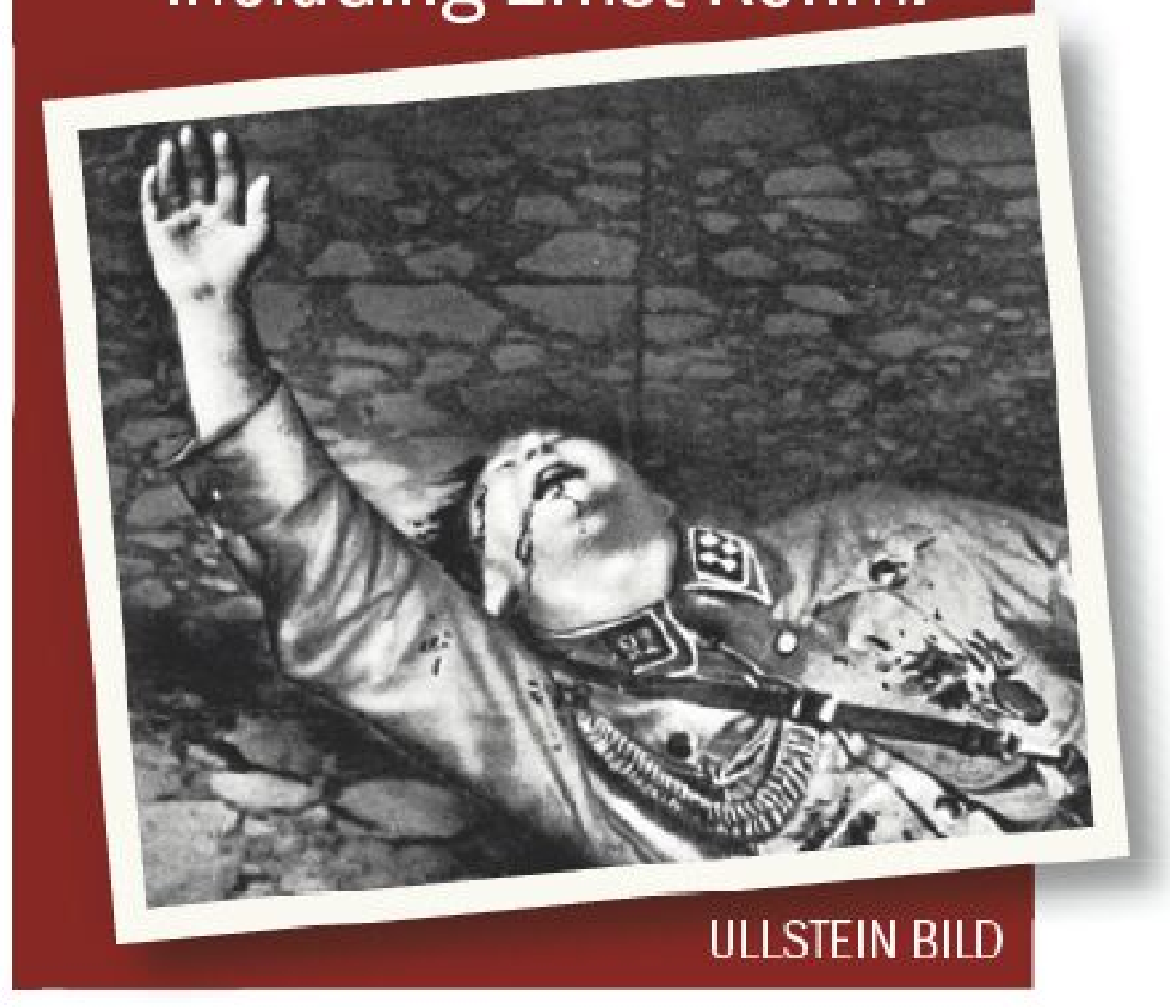
BPK

SS chief Heinrich Himmler was wary of his blazingly intelligent second in command, but Heydrich's achievements and ideas proved indispensable to the Nazis.

HEYDRICH

THE BRAIN BEHIND THE SA'S ANNIHILATION

As Gestapo chief, Heydrich personally selected the SA leaders killed during the Night of the Long Knives in June 1934 – including Ernst Röhm.



ULLSTEIN BILD

Heydrich's naval expulsion

The story of the 'Blonde Beast's' path to the top of the Nazi hierarchy, however, started far from the Czech capital, and with a significantly less assured Reinhard Heydrich.

In the spring of 1931, the then 27-year-old German's life had just fallen apart. For several days, he had locked himself in his parents' home in the south-eastern German city of Halle, crying with anger and self-pity for the injustice he'd just experienced. A woman had claimed that Heydrich had promised her marriage. Heydrich himself believed he was perfectly within his rights to have left the woman in favour of vehement Nazi party member Lina von Osten.

In front of a military court of honour, Heydrich denied having promised the abandoned woman anything, and defiantly declared that he saw no reason for the court's interference with what he, as a naval officer, should and should not do. This high-handed attitude did not win over the naval chiefs, and the young lieutenant's dreams of a career at sea were shattered as he found himself thrown out of the navy.

The atmosphere in his parents' home only served to make the young Heydrich even more depressed. The respectable bourgeois family was hit hard by the economic crisis enveloping the country. His father was too ill to work, and his once-renowned music conservatory in Halle was on the verge of losing state recognition. And, with no funds for a maid, his mother had to do the housework herself at the same time as supporting the family's three adult children by giving piano lessons.

Heydrich lands a job with the SS

For months, Heydrich and Lina von Osten pondered their fate. The solution came via Heydrich's mother, who was deeply concerned by seeing her son so depressed.

Through a friend, she learned that the National Socialist German Workers' Party was looking for someone for its leader's newly created bodyguard, the SS. It was a position that, not insignificantly, would allow little 'Reini' to wear a smart black SS uniform to replace his lost navy attire.

Heydrich immediately joined this Nazi party, a prerequisite for the job, and on Lina's 20th birthday on 14th June, he travelled to Munich to meet the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler. According to Lina, it was "the starriest hour of my life, of our life".

Himmler received Heydrich at his small poultry farm on the outskirts of Munich, and was immediately impressed by the tall, blond Heydrich's 'Aryan' appearance. He set a test for his visitor: the Nazi party wanted to create an intelligence apparatus, and Himmler asked Heydrich how it should be organised.

It was only then that it dawned on Heydrich what the position entailed, but he immediately threw himself into the assignment. To arrive at a solution, he combined his naval experience with the intelligence methods he had read about in his beloved British spy novels.

The result impressed Himmler. The 30-year-old SS chief's brief acknowledgment of Heydrich's suggestion read: "Good, I'll take you on". The pair agreed a modest starting salary of 120 Reichsmarks a month.

In the early 1930s, Hitler's party was plagued by internal power struggles, which Heydrich quickly realised could be exploited to his advantage. From his modest office in Munich's party headquarters, where for the first months he was required to share a typewriter with another party official, he tirelessly gathered useful information on the Nazi party's friends and enemies. At first, Heydrich's limited his intelligence gathering to specific people, and his files comprised just a few paper cards in a cigar box, but over the following three years it grew into a huge, well-organised directory. By 1934, Heydrich was the most well-informed man in the Nazi system.

He knew the most unpleasant, personal episodes from Hitler's youth. He knew of Goebbels' many affairs, of Göring's morphine abuse, and of the abdominal cramps that Himmler worked so hard to conceal.

Heydrich had compromising information on almost everyone, which he could use at a later date if necessary. Heydrich's directory was put to use for the first time shortly after Hitler's takeover in 1933. Heydrich's security service (the SD, or Sicherheitsdienst) set up the Nazis' first concentration camp in Dachau, and the communists, socialists, intellectuals and anti-Nazi artists catalogued in Heydrich's files were among the first inmates.

The Nazi apprentice

In recognition of his good work, Heydrich was promoted in April 1934 to head up the secret police, the Gestapo, in addition to his existing role. Later that year, he organised the Night of the Long Knives, helping to purge the paramilitary SA and remove a potential threat to Hitler's leadership in the form of SA leader Ernst Röhm.

The Führer had begun to perceive the brown-clad SA army of street-fighting thugs as a problem that needed addressing. ▶

HEYDRICH
POSTER BOY FOR THE THIRD REICH

Heydrich's Aryan appearance secured him hero status in the Third Reich. Among other things, he was a model in books showing the correct Nazi salute and uniform.

TOPFOTO

SS ENFORCER RELAXED BY FENCING AND PLAYING THE VIOLIN

The fiery workaholic Heydrich found peace in two passions: fencing and solitary moments with his beloved violin.

Although Reinhard Heydrich often worked 16 hours a day, he still found time to cultivate his two passions: fencing and music.

Heydrich was the star of the German fencing team in 1941. He loved the sport so much that it was the motivation for a handful of extremely rare glimpses of mercy. He helped former German fencing champion Paul Sommer, a Jew, escape to the United States. And when Germany invaded Poland, he immediately sent express instructions that no members of Poland's Olympic fencing team should be harmed.

While his fencing skills were taught, Heydrich's other great interest, music, was effectively printed on his baptismal certificate. He received his middle name Tristan after Wagner's opera 'Tristan and Isolde', and his second middle name, Eugen, came from his grandfather, who founded the world-famous Dresden Royal Conservatory. Despite his musical origins and unmistakable ability as a violinist, Heydrich never chose to focus on music as a career path. Rather, it acted as a retreat from his work: often, colleagues found Heydrich in his back yard, wearing his black SS uniform, completely lost to the outside world while he played his violin with expert skill.

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Heydrich was one of the stars of the German fencing team in 1941.

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The Nazi model family, with Heydrich's wife Lina and children Silke, Heider and Klaus.

Heydrich immediately offered a solution: from his thousands of index cards, he quickly compiled a list of SA leaders that had to be killed.

While Hitler and Himmler arrested the primary targets, Heydrich himself did not refrain from signing execution orders. A total of 89 people were killed between 30th June and 2nd July, all without trial. Among those executed were former party organiser Gregor Strasser, who was held at the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin and shot from behind on Heydrich's orders. The other prisoners heard the Gestapo boss exclaim: "Isn't he dead yet? Let the swine bleed." With those words, Heydrich left his former party comrade to die on the floor of his cell.

Fearless and friendless

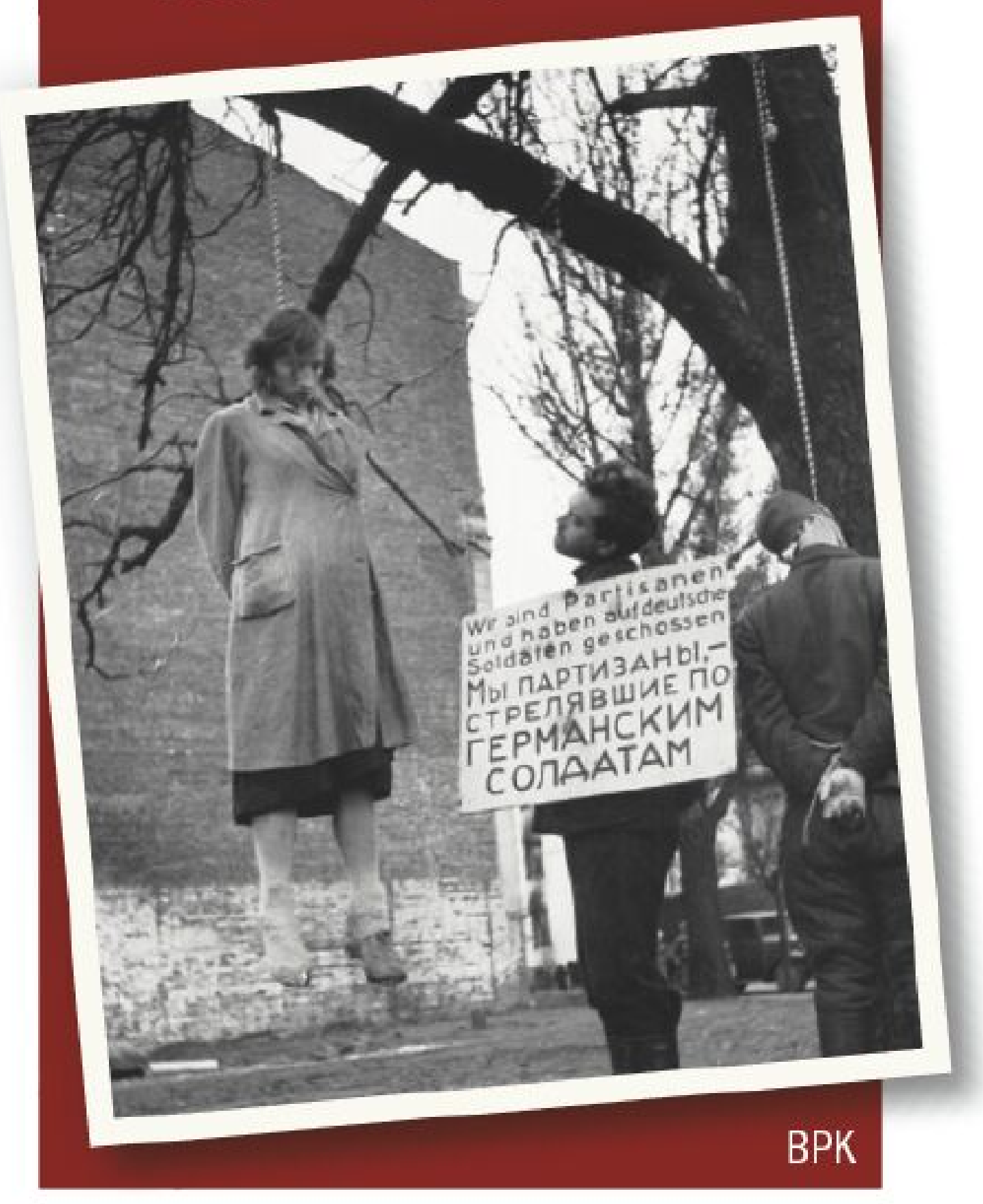
This was typical of Heydrich, who never let friendships get in the way of his career. Instead, he made it to the top via his immense work ethic. He always made sure to stay one step ahead, especially in relation to Himmler, whom he was able to frequently win over with his well-prepared and razor-sharp arguments. Often, Heydrich would manoeuvre his SS commander so well he could hardly agree to do otherwise than agree with his deputy.

"As a political personality, Heydrich is undoubtedly more dynamic and far superior. He knows this and expresses his superiority in the elegance of his reports, and Himmler is simply unable to match him," noted Himmler's masseur Dr Felix Kersten, who often had the opportunity to observe the

HEYDRICH

LEADER OF THE DEATH SQUADS

Heydrich headed the Einsatzgruppen, the dreaded death squads that executed more than two million Jews, Romanies and Soviet partisans on the Eastern Front.


МЫ ПАРТИЗАНЫ СТРЕЛЯВШИЕ ПО ГЕРМАНСКИМ СОЛДАТАМ
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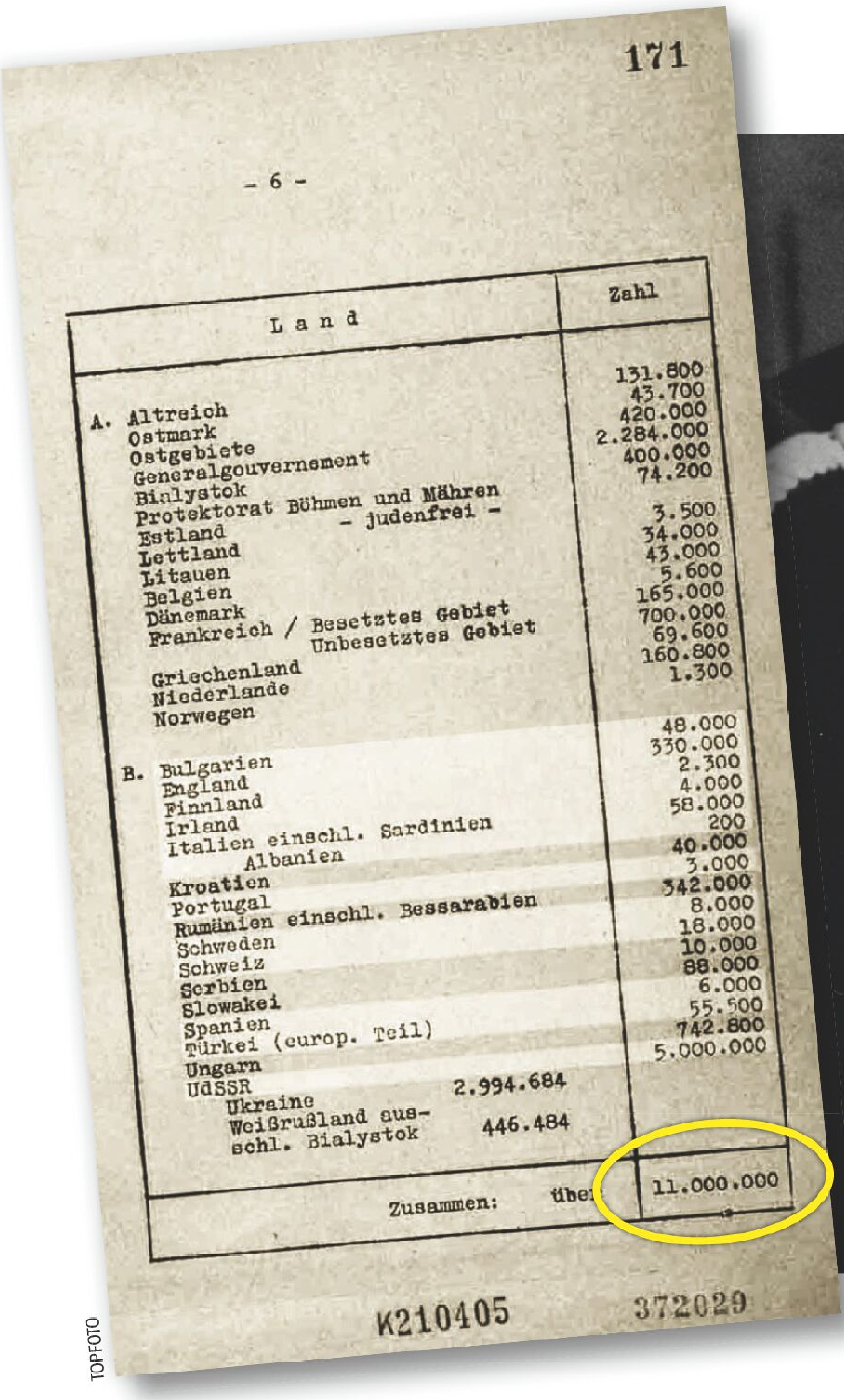
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- 6 -

Land		Zahl
A. Altreich		131.800
Ostmark		43.700
Ostgebiete		420.000
Generalgouvernement		2.284.000
Bialystok		400.000
Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren		74.200
Estland		- judenfrei -
Lettland		3.500
Litauen		34.000
Belgien		43.000
Dänemark		5.600
Frankreich / Besetztes Gebiet		165.000
Unbesetztes Gebiet		700.000
Griechenland		69.600
Niederlande		160.800
Norwegen		1.300
B. Bulgarien		48.000
England		330.000
Finnland		2.300
Irland		4.000
Italien einschl. Sardinien		58.000
Albanien		200
Kroatien		40.000
Portugal		3.000
Rumänien einschl. Bessarabien		342.000
Schweden		8.000
Schweiz		18.000
Serbien		10.000
Slowakei		88.000
Spanien		6.000
Türkei (europ. Teil)		55.500
Ungarn		742.800
UdSSR		5.000.000
Ukraine	2.994.684	
Weißrußland ausschl. Bialystok	446.484	
Zusammen:	über	11.000.000

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TOPFOTO

BPK

In 1941, when the Nazi leadership planned the extermination of the Jews, Heydrich laid the foundations. He estimated the number of Jews in Europe to be 11 million.

SUSPICIONS OF ‘IMPURE’ BLOOD DOGGED HEYDRICH

Rumours of Jewish blood in his family history threatened Heydrich’s career and were a perpetual concern for the otherwise confident man.

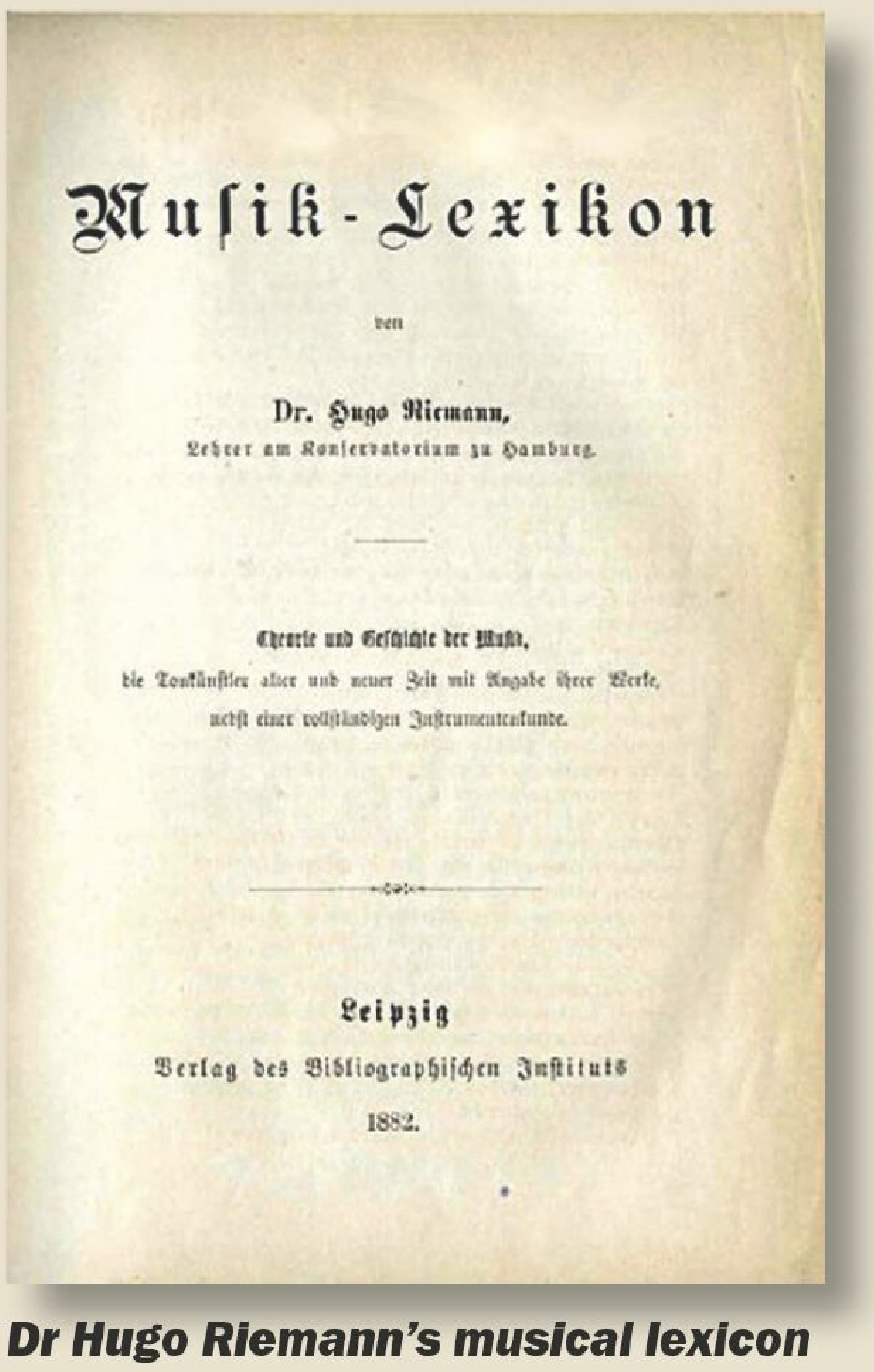
Throughout his time in the Nazi party, Reinhard Heydrich had to fight rumours that Jewish blood was concealed in his ancestry – and that despite his Aryan appearance he was not of ‘pure blood’.

Stories of Heydrich’s Jewish descent were fed by a listing in a 1916 music encyclopaedia about Heydrich’s father, a famous opera singer. In the lexicon, his father was erroneously listed with the Jewish-sounding surname Süss as a hyphenated prefix to his actual surname, giving Süss-Heydrich.

Based on this error, Hitler ordered an investigation into the Gestapo chief’s background. To Heydrich’s relief, Germany’s leading racial expert, Dr Achim Gercke, concluded that Heydrich was “of German origin and free from any admixture of coloured or Jewish blood”. However, Heydrich remained so troubled by the rumours that he hired renowned genealogist Ernst Hoffmann to help dispel them.

For several years, the genealogist met regularly at Heydrich’s office to brief him on his research – and each time the usually icy Heydrich greeted him nervously: “To judge by the way he looked at me whenever I arrived at his office, his doubts were evident,” Hoffmann wrote.

The Nazi leadership took full advantage of the doubts over Heydrich’s past. To Himmler, Hitler remarked: “His non-Aryan origin will suit us admirably. He will be eternally grateful to us for having retained him, and will obey us blindly.”



Muſik-Lexikon

von

Dr. Hugo Riemann,
Lehrer am Konſervatorium zu Hamburg.

Theorie und Geſchichte der Muſik,
die Tonkünſtler alter und neuer Zeit mit Angabe ihrer Werke,
nebſt einer vollſtändigen Inſtrumentenkunde.

Leipzig
Verlag des Bibliographiſchen Inſtituts
1882.

Dr Hugo Riemann’s musical lexicon fed rumours of Heydrich's ancestry.

two at close quarters. Yet despite their closeness, Heydrich insisted on addressing Himmler with “Sie”, the formal form of “you”, as he feared the personal form (“Du”) would weaken the strength of his arguments in the mind of his superior.

According to Kersten, at times Himmler seemed almost “raped mentally” after reading a report from Heydrich. Instead of directly denying Heydrich’s requests, Himmler would have a subordinate telephone Heydrich and inform him that Himmler would have to discuss the proposal with Hitler. “He would inform Heydrich later of his denial in the shape of an alleged Führer-Order,” Kersten explained.

Planning the Holocaust

From this we can see that even Heydrich’s immediate superior avoided direct confrontations with his second-in-command, and Heydrich was feared even more by his own employees. He was ice cold, focused and always had his eyes rigidly on the prize: to pave the way for the Führer’s vision of a Greater Germanic Reich. As one of the party’s visionaries, Heydrich was already convinced in the late 1930s that a natural consequence of Germany’s expansion was the elimination of Europe’s Jews. Whether that meant deporting them to Madagascar or Siberia or exterminating them with bullets or gas – all options that Heydrich considered – was a mere detail. What was most important to him was that the plan worked. For a long time, he struggled with the logistical problems of his scheme, but finally, in January 1942, he was able to proudly present ’The Final Solution to the Jewish Question’ in a villa in the Berlin district of Wannsee.

For Heydrich, the Wannsee Conference was his greatest achievement. His master plan was complete in every detail. Europe’s Jews had been counted, and the concentration camps made ready. The rail network was performing well, and the Zyklon B gas had proved extremely efficient. With the approval of Hitler and Himmler, Heydrich could bring the Holocaust to fruition.

At the same time, Heydrich was personally selected by Hitler to take control of the troubled protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (today’s Czech Republic). Due to the extensive armament production in Bohemia, it was particularly crucial that the Führer kept the area under tight control. Konstantin von Neurath, Heydrich’s predecessor, was stripped of his executive powers due to his perceived inability to keep the Czechs on a sufficiently short leash; Heydrich was sent in as his ‘deputy’ to crush local dissent in September 1941.

HEYDRICH
GOVERNOR OF BOHEMIA AND MORAVIA

During his tenure as governor, Heydrich pacified the previously unruly province. The resistance movement was crushed, and civilians were placated with boons, such as increased food rations and pension payouts.

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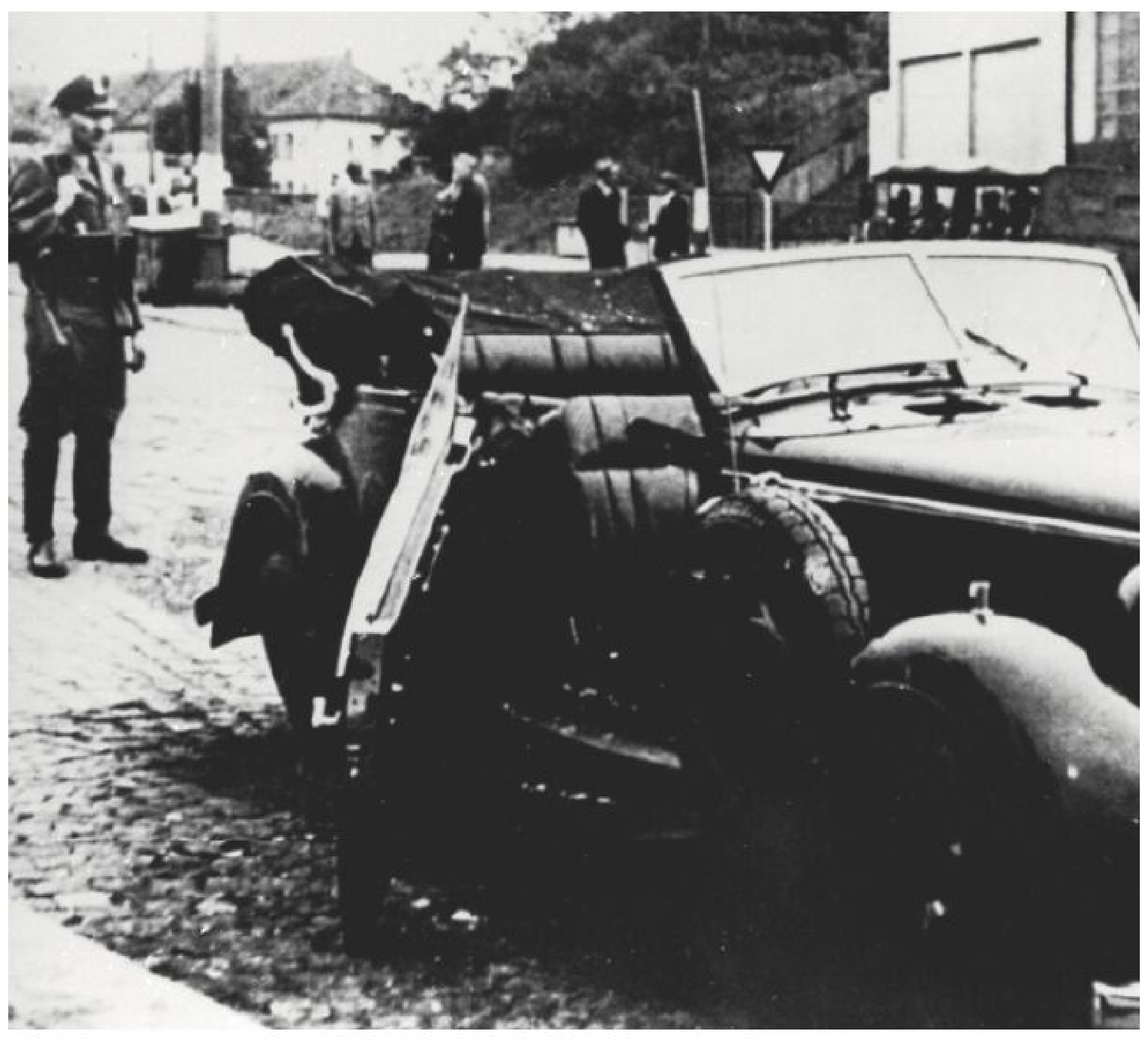
The king of Prague

Heydrich ruled with an iron fist. During a speech to his staff shortly after assuming power, he explained that the Czechs could be divided into two groups: one half could be Germanised, while the other half would be deported to Siberia once the Soviet Union had been annexed to the Reich. In order to separate the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’, Heydrich managed his protectorate with a well-


BPK

The damage to Heydrich and his Mercedes was limited, but the metal shrapnel from the explosion left him with fatal sepsis.

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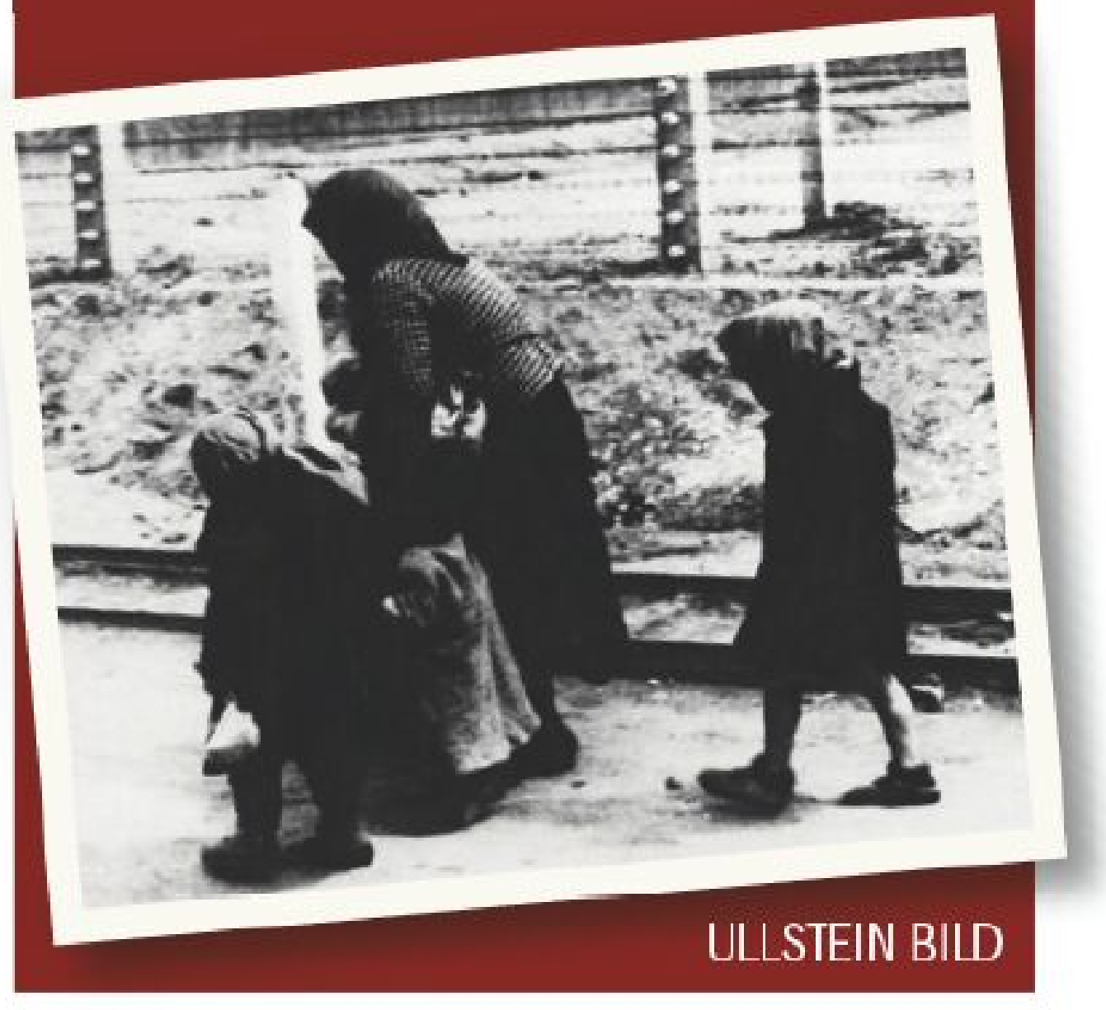
Reinhard's sons: eight-year-old Klaus (right) and his brother Heider, seven, at their father's state funeral. Klaus died in a traffic accident in 1942; Heider died in 2007.

calculated mix of carrot and stick: he immediately declared a state of emergency and forcibly repressed the well-established Czech resistance movement. By February 1942, between four and five hundred people had been executed, and more than four thousand had passed through the Gestapo's torture cells as the deportation of Prague's Jews began. Czech Prime Minister Alois Elias was arrested just hours after Heydrich's arrival, and within a week he had been sentenced to death. His sentence was carried out in June 1942.

In order to ease the mood, Heydrich increased food rations, established soup kitchens for the poor, facilitated access to tobacco and initiated an intensive crackdown on the black market, whose traders were loathed by the population. The new governor also took the time to receive workers' representatives at Prague's Hradcany Castle, addressing them as "comrades at work" and promising to meet their demands. Heydrich travelled around Prague without protection in an open-top car. Because, as he himself reasoned, "Why should my Czechs shoot me?"

HEYDRICH ARCHITECT OF THE HOLOCAUST

In his role as head of the Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration, Heydrich developed a precise plan for deporting and exterminating Europe's 11 million Jews.


ULLSTEIN BILD

The man who feared no one

The strategy appeared to pay off – tensions among the general public were easing, while the resistance movement was decimated in a matter of months: its leaders were out of the picture and the public were too afraid to support it.

Following this success, Heydrich installed himself and his family in the Panenské Brežany chateau north of Prague. Here, he began a comfortable life as the Germanic master of the Czechs, while commuting twice a week to Berlin to take care of his duties as chief of the Reich's security services. Proud, arrogant and convinced of the full subjugation of his Czech subjects,

Death in Prague

When Heydrich raised his gun on the Prague street corner and aimed it at Jozef Gabcík, the concentration camps' gas chambers had only just come into operation, and the Führer's plans for a racially pure German empire still seemed to be feasible.

But Heydrich never saw his plans realised. As he pulled the trigger on his empty gun, Gabcík's comrade Jan Kubiš threw one of his bombs at the black Mercedes.

The throw was too short – the bomb exploded near the right rear wheel of the car, but it was enough: the explosion caused metal shrapnel from the car and horse hair from the upholstered seat to pierce Heydrich's back.

Although Heydrich – so the story goes – pursued his assailants, he soon collapsed on a street corner. The Gestapo boss was immediately taken to the nearby Bulovka hospital. Although initially it seemed like he would make a good recovery, he later fell into a coma from which he never recovered. Reinhard Heydrich died on 4th June from sepsis. The architect of the Holocaust was no more. ■

CZECH VILLAGES PAID THE PRICE FOR DEATH

Adolf Hitler considered Heydrich a shining star of the Nazi party, and in a fit of rage he ordered brutal reprisals following his assassination. Any town associated with the killers would feel Hitler's anger.

The Czech resistance movement's attack on Heydrich enraged Hitler like nothing before. On 9th June 1942 – just five days after Heydrich's death – he issued a direct order to the SS leadership in Prague.

In any village that had housed Heydrich's murderers, the SS were to execute all the men, send the women to concentration camps and any Aryan-looking children to Germany. After that the towns were to be obliterated and levelled.

German intelligence believed that the assassins came from the small Czech village of Lidice outside Prague, and they quickly set about extracting their revenge.

They executed the village's 173 men in groups of five near a barn; at the same time, they deported all 198 women to the Ravensbrück concentration camp and 105 of the village's children to the Lodz ghetto. Youngsters with blonde hair and blue eyes were sent to be 'Germanised', a process that involved their adoption by SS-approved families in Germany.

Lidice was then burned to the ground and the village ruins were flattened. The same fate befell the small quarry town of Ležáky, where one of the leaders who planned the attack originated. But Hitler's revenge didn't stop there. The Nazis imposed the death penalty on anyone who so much as welcomed Heydrich's murder, and thousands of Czechs came under suspicion of cooperating with the resistance movement. A total of 13,000 were arrested, deported to the concentration camps or executed.

The horrors and violence of the summer of 1942 were subsequently named the 'Heydrichiade' by Czechs.

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The 600-year-old, idyllic village of Lidice with its 500 inhabitants lay 22 km north-west of Prague.

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Over the course of two days, the SS destroyed the village before engineer troops removed all traces of Lidice.

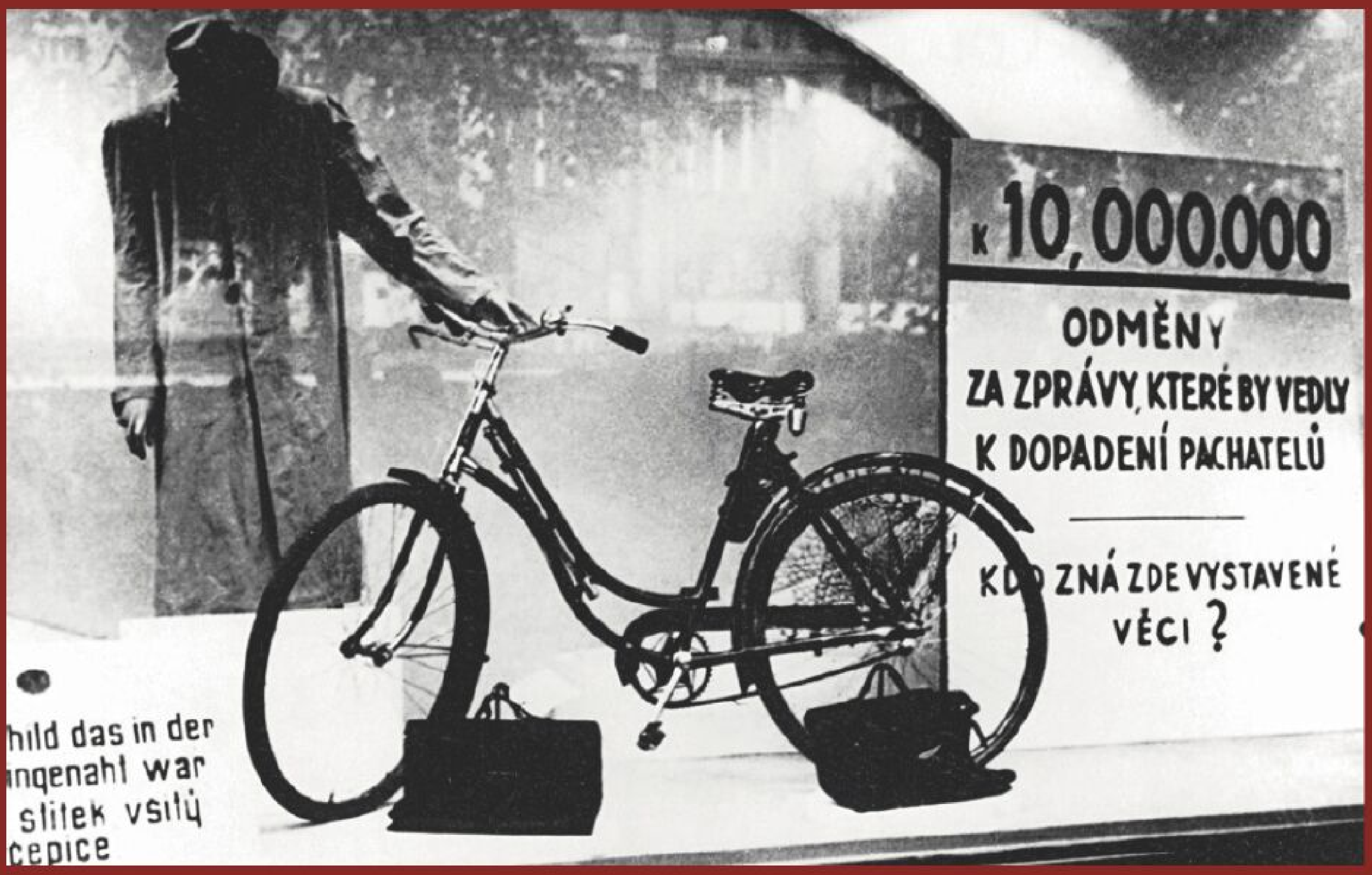
TOPFOTO

All men were shot in reprisal for Heydrich's murder.

Killers managed to commit suicide

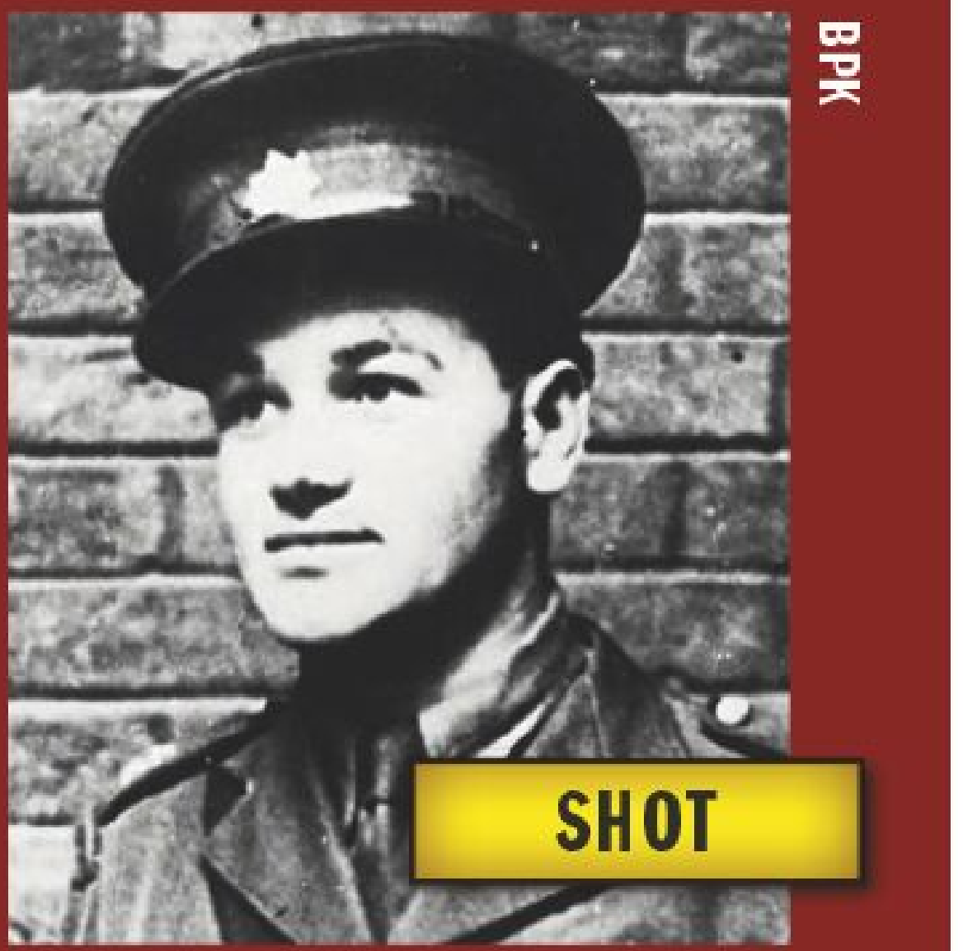
For three weeks, the Gestapo hunted the two assassins Jan Kubiš (top right) and Jozef Gabcík (bottom right).

After a tip-off from a traitor in the Czech resistance, an 800-strong SS and Gestapo force stormed the church where the two men had taken refuge early on the morning of 18th June 1942. Realising that the exchange of fire that followed was futile, all but one of the resistance fighters committed suicide to avoid capture by vengeful Nazis.

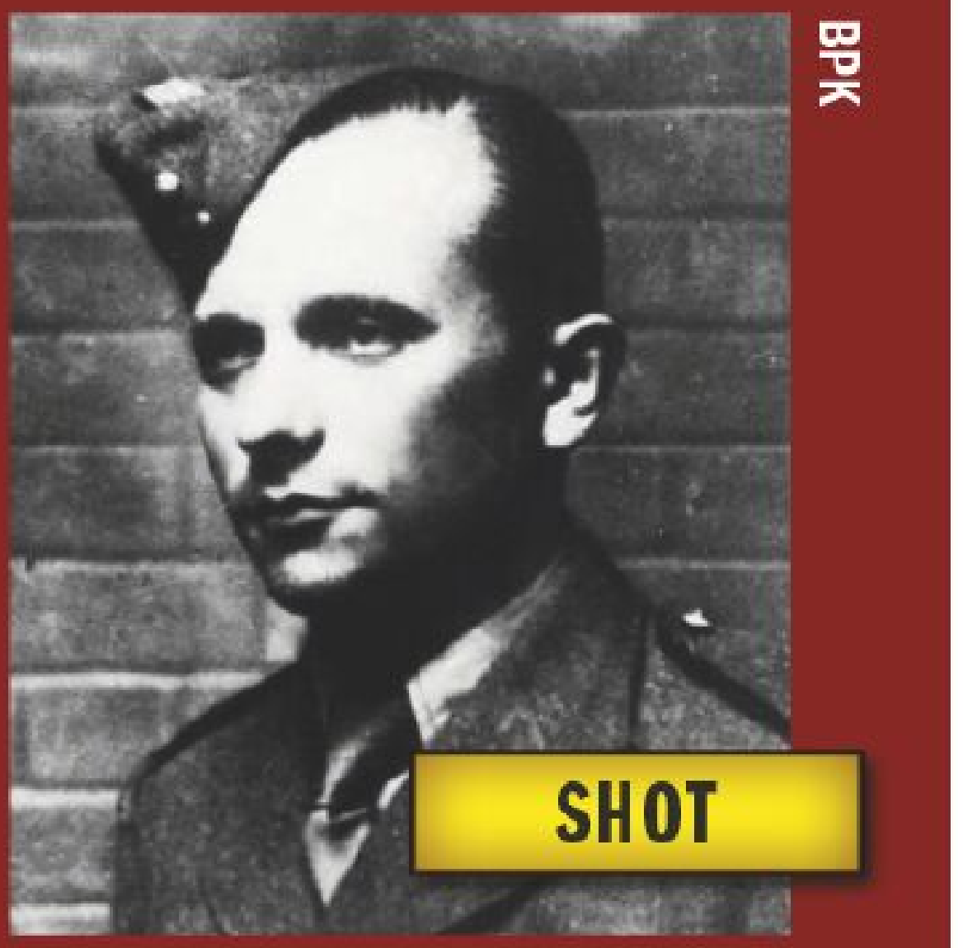


ULLSTEIN BILD

The Gestapo exhibited a bicycle one of the assassin's had to used to flee, the case containing the bombs and Gabcík's raincoat; they also offered a generous reward.



BPK



BPK

During an action in 1944, several members of the French resistance movement were arrested by Vichy regime militia.

BUNDESARCHIV BILD 146-1989-107-24 / KOLL / CC-BY-SA 3.0

Klaus Barbie

THE BUTCHER OF LYONS

Red-hot needles, whips and boiling water – the butcher Klaus Barbie's sadistic methods knew no limits. Over two years he tortured thousands of Jews and opponents in the French city of Lyon. When the Allies freed the city, Barbie fled and found a new employer.

Text: **KASPER SCHLIE**

“AT THE GESTAPO’S HEADQUARTERS ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF HOTEL TERMINUS, THE MESSAGE WAS CLEAR: I CAME TO KILL”

GABRIEL HACKETT/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY

After World War II, Barbie worked for the British and US intelligence services before going underground in Bolivia in 1955. Here he is wearing German uniform in 1944.

German officers in occupied Lyon in 1942. In the background, you can see Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie.

BRIDGEMAN/IBL

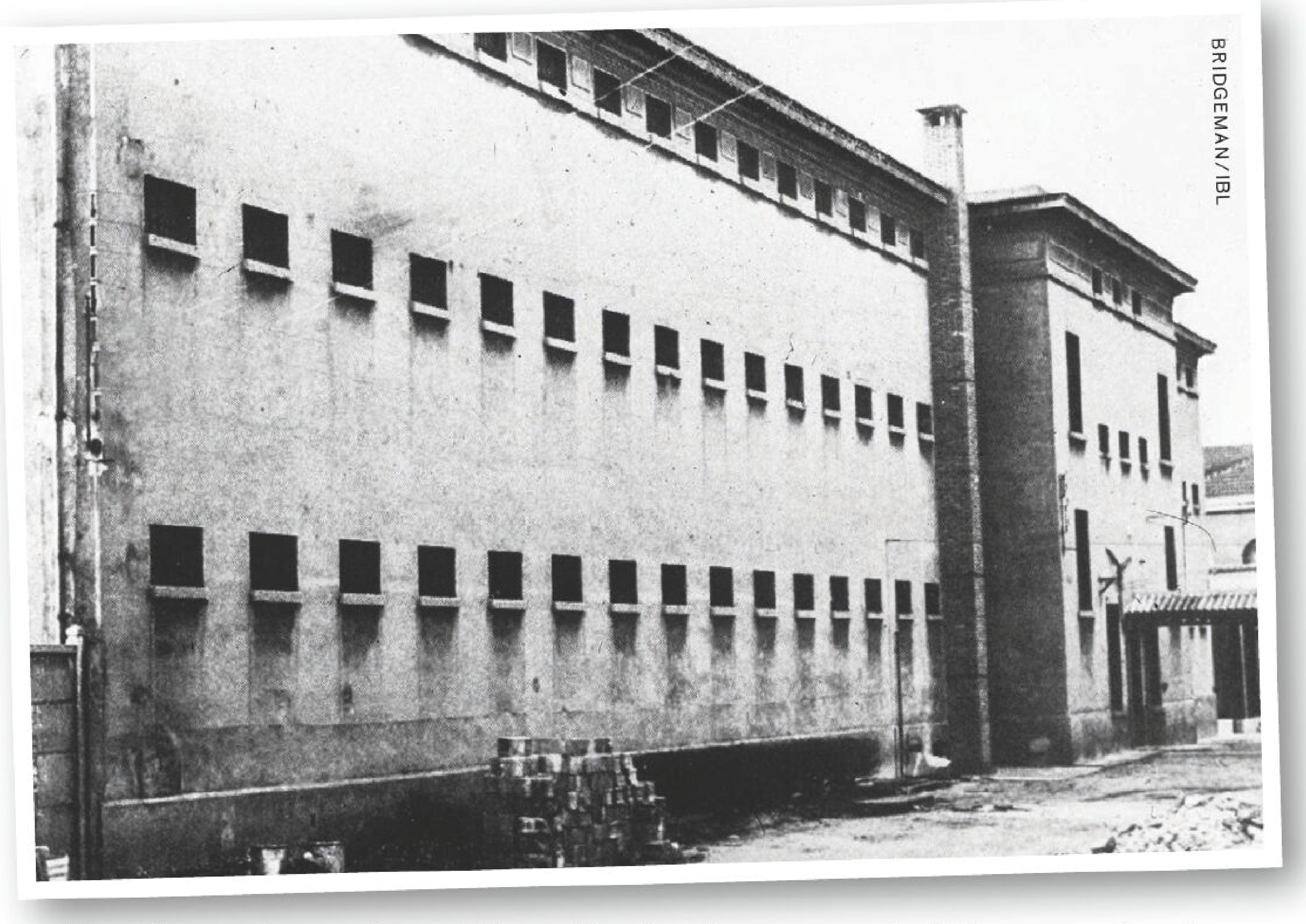
Just a single lamp cast a pale light over Suite 68 of Hotel Terminus at Lyon train station. Jewish scientist Marcel Gompel sat on a wooden chair in the middle of the floor .

Gompel had ended up in the clutches of Klaus Barbie, infamous local Gestapo chief. The 29-year-old Nazi had beaten Gompel with clubs and pushed his head under water until his lungs were bursting. But Gompel had not given the German anything but his steely gaze, so Barbie played his trump card.

An assistant attached chains to the prisoner's ankles and using a pulley fixed to the ceiling he hoisted Gompel so the victim was hanging upside down. The assistant picked up a knife and systematically cut the scientist's skin for several hours. His screams did not reach the street outside.

But Barbie was not happy. A bathtub was filled with a sharp-smelling chemical concoction,, and on the order of the Gestapo chief, Gompel was lowered into the tub. He moaned and writhed, and when he passed out, Barbie revived the victim by pouring boiling water on his mutilated body so the interrogation could continue. For three days after the interrogation, Gompel wandered among his terrified fellow inmates. The pain was so intense that he could neither sit or lie down. When he eventually died, the other prisoners held hands and sang the *Marseillaise*.

Simply the word Gestapo, the name of the Nazi secret police, brought every Jew or resistance fighter in the occupied territories out in a cold sweat. The police flouted the rules of the Geneva Convention and continued to use increasingly tortuous methods. In Lyon, a man emerged who was so much more than anything Gestapo chief Henrich Himmler could have hoped for. Klaus Barbie was the most brutal Gestapo executioner of all.



BRIDGEMAN/IBL

Montluc prison where Klaus Barbie incarcerated thousands of resistance members and Jews.

WHEN BARBIE WAS BORN in 1913, there was nothing that suggested he would be anything but a regular, lawful citizen. His parents Anna and Nikolaus Barbie were Catholics and well-liked teachers in the small town of Udler, south of Bonn. Barbie was perceived by most as a pleasant and smart boy who chatted happily with the people he met.

WORLD WAR I broke the family idyll. His father came back after a prolonged captivity in France – a country he began to hate fervently. He was traumatised after the fighting, and had shrapnel in his neck. He tried to bury the terrible memories with alcohol and began to abuse his wife and both sons. Therefore, Barbie found it as a great relief when he was sent to boarding school in Trier in 1923. His diligence and intelligence meant he planned to study theology at university.

But then came the fatal year of 1933. First, the Nazis took power in Germany, and in June Barbie's younger brother died from illness. When his alcoholic father died, Barbie went into a deep depression. On top of everything else, he'd have to forget his expensive plans for further study. Barbie had been born illegitimately, and in a very conservative Germany he did not inherit a single mark. His future looked particularly bleak.

"IN 1913 THERE WAS NO SIGN THAT HE WOULD BE ANYTHING BUT A REGULAR, LAWFUL CITIZEN"

Emblem for Sicherheitsdienst – the SS's internal intelligence service.

THE YOUNG and intelligent Barbie soon found his way into another career. After two years as a fanatic member of *Hitler Jugend* – the Hitler Youth – ►

Gestapo existed in all occupied countries

The Gestapo torturers terrorised civilian populations throughout Europe. Local officials developed their own methods.

★ The Gestapo was an extended arm of the German Nazi party, governed by the iron fist of Heinrich Himmler. It monitored and fought all those who were thought to pose a threat to the state.

The organisation's 32,000 men worked with terrifying precision and during the war years it developed a number of methods to unravel the enemy's network. "Very simple diet; hard bunk; dark cell; deprivation of sleep; exhaustive drilling; also flogging" was how the official Gestapo directive described the methods used in a secret document dated 12th June, 1942.

In reality, the secret police used a significant number of more brutal methods to extract information from their enemies in Germany and in the occupied territories. Water torture and abuse were used everywhere where the Gestapo operated, but some prosecutors also developed their own techniques.

Norway: deadly bath of iced water. Gestapo man Richard Bruns forced information from the resistance by laying them in an ice bath until they almost froze to death. Bruns was executed in Oslo in 1947.

Denmark: whipped with wires. In Copenhagen's Gestapo headquarters, torturer Ib Birkedal bent his suspects over a table and whipped them with wires until they began to talk.

Poland: prisoners beat each other. The Gestapo ran a large prison in Poland, but did not perform the torture themselves. Instead, non-Jews were forced to abuse their Jewish fellow prisoners as the Gestapo watched.

Belgium: electrodes in open wounds. Gestapo agent Max Gunter first cut his prisoners. Then he placed electrodes in the open wounds and turned on the power.

Netherlands: torturer Andries Pieters invented his own methods of torture. He made his opponents talk by tying string tightly around their genitals.

BRIDGEMAN/IBL

Klaus Barbie always brought his infamous baton.

The Gestapo executed over 4,000 civilians in Lyon during Barbie's regime. Here a member of the French resistance has been hung from a tree.

LAPI/ROGER-VIOLLET/GETTY

> “BARBIE MANAGED TO PLANT AROUND 20 AGENTS INTO THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT”

he was admitted to the SS intelligence service SD in September 1935. It appears it was here he found his true calling, finding both clarity and clearly defined foes. Over the next few years, Barbie received intense training in policing and in interrogation techniques to break any "enemy of the state".

FROM 1940 things moved at a furious pace. In April, Barbie was promoted to SS-Untersturmführer. Five days later he married, and then in May he was posted to occupied Amsterdam. He threw himself into his work with great energy, constantly gathering intelligence. He confined arrested Jews in a newly created ghetto and sent thousands of people by train to the concentration camps in Buchenwald and Mauthausen.

Gestapo high command took notice. Barbie was promoted to captain and in November 1942 he was sent to Lyon in France as chief of the local Gestapo.

For the Nazis, Lyon was a ticking time bomb. Jews, communists and opponents had built widespread networks throughout the city from the beginning of the war. When Barbie spoke to his subordinates for the first time at the Gestapo's headquarters on the third floor of Hotel Terminus, the message was quite clear: *"Ich bin gekommen om zu töten"* – I came to kill.

Barbie took advantage of his experiences in Amsterdam, and soon filled Montluc prison with Jews. But the resistance movement led by Jean Moulin proved harder to break. Those involved were fearless and so good at melting into the local population that La Concorde café was a meeting place for both the Gestapo and the resistance movement. Often the enemies sat just a few metres apart drinking espresso.

Barbie managed to plant around 20 agents into the resistance movement, and eventually information began to filter back to Gestapo headquarters. A notice board in the basement of Hotel Terminus was filled with pictures and information that revealed the links between the suspects.

THE BIG BREAKTHROUGH came in 1943. A well-placed French traitor tipped Barbie about a secret meeting that would take place in a villa in Lyon. All the resistance movement leaders were there. That same evening, Moulin was barely able ►

RUEDESARCHIVES/AGIP/IBL

A traitor revealed resistance fighter Jean Moulin in 1943. Despite sadistic torture, the Frenchman did not say a single word.

Torture would make the prisoner talk

Red-hot needles, handcuffs with spikes, and oxygen. Klaus Barbie was prepared to use all possible methods to force prisoners to talk.

★ **Handcuff with spikes:** the prisoner was handcuffed. When they were raised to the roof by chains, spikes on the inside drilled their flesh.
★ **Just fists:** Barbie used to abuse his prisoners himself. A witness has told that he hit directly into open wounds and fractures.
★ **Baton:** Barbie always had a small black baton padded with lead with him when he interrogated a prisoner.
★ **Bottle:** beer bottles were pushed deep into the prisoner's mouth until their lips split.
★ **Morning star:** prisoners were ordered to lie on their stomach. Then Barbie struck them with a spiked ball. A female victim lost the ability to walk after the torture.
★ **Cannula:** one prisoner had oxygen injected into their bladder.
★ **Red-hot needles:** Jean Moulin, the French resistance fighter, had red-hot needles pushed under his nails.
★ **Electrodes:** captives were given electric shocks of varying intensity and duration.
★ **Tooth pliers:** if the prisoner denied the charge or refused to answer, Barbie often responded by pulling out one of the victim's teeth.
★ **Tendon removal:** a prisoner told of how Barbie drilled a hole in his hand, jabbed a finger into the wound and pulled out the tendons.
★ **Skin flaying:** a prisoner testified to this medieval torture method. Skin was torn off in long strips and then the prisoner was lowered into a chemical cocktail.
★ **Bathtub with boiling water:** quick dips in the water gave prisoners second-degree burns.
★ **Bath with ice water:** used to wake up unconscious prisoners so that their torture could continue.

SHUTTERSTOCK

to start the meeting before the door was kicked in and the room was filled with manic German commandos as brawls broke out.

Barbie had caught the French in their own backyard. In a matter of minutes, all were handcuffed and removed. When the Gestapo's black cars drove in through the gate at Montluc prison, everyone knew what would happen: all the French had heard rumours about the torture.

Barbie started by attempting to charm his prisoners into talking. He offered Moulin a drink and a cigar in the elegant bar at Hotel Terminus. A pianist played Chopin, and portraits of Hitler, Göring and Goebbels stared down from the walls. But Moulin refused to talk. He stared down at the table and did not say a single word.

Barbie became furious at this slight and he took the Frenchman into suite 68. His assistant Dr Bartelmus had prepared the tools for Barbie's torture: knuckledusters, whips, handcuffs with pins, needles, a lit candle and Barbie's black baton.

Dr Bartelmus held Moulin's hand between the door and the door frame while Barbie repeatedly hit the door. The Frenchman's fingers were broken one by one. The screams could not be heard from the soundproofed room. Needles were warmed up to glowing before being pushed under Moulin's nails. He was assaulted with knuckledusters and clubs as blood spewed from a number of wounds.

"I want names!" Barbie asked time after time, but Moulin remained silent.

WHEN THE FRENCHMAN passed out from pain, Barbie pushed his head into a bath of icy water so Moulin almost drowned. Roughly he was pulled up from the water, and Barbie repeated his questions. Then Moulin was pressed under the water again.

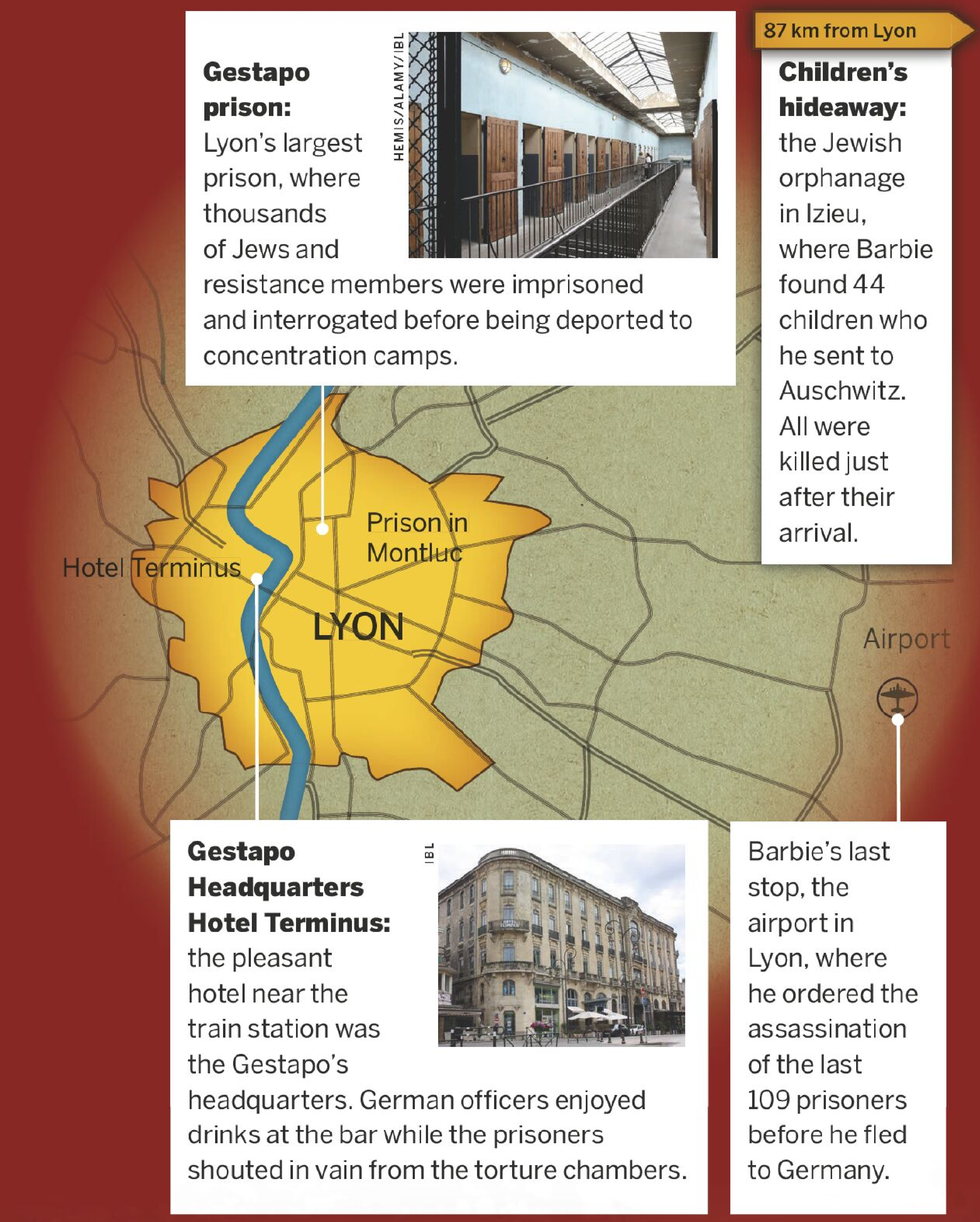
Moulin was cuffed with screw-levered handcuffs around his wrists. The cuffs were tightened so spikes on the inside broke through to the bone and blood flowed. His legs were also crushed.

The torture lasted for several days. Moulin's nails were pulled out, needles were stabbed into his body, he was branded and beaten again and again. Every evening he was driven back to Montluc prison where the prisoners tried to fix his injuries. One of the prisoners, Christian Pineau, remembers the long night of horror:

"He had lost consciousness, his eyes were hollowed as if they were buried in his head. He had an ugly bluish wound on his temple. A low moan escaped from his swollen lips". At the same time, Barbie threw himself into Lyon's nightlife, where liquor flowed freely and scantily clad women crowded around the powerful officers. Several of them – including Barbie – were treated for sexually transmitted diseases. Barbie loved playing the piano and singing old German songs during these wild

Executioner thrived in Lyon

The Gestapo established its headquarters in a hotel. While the policemen drank at the bar, the prisoners were waiting in the torture cellar.



Gestapo prison: Lyon's largest prison, where thousands of Jews and resistance members were imprisoned and interrogated before being deported to concentration camps.

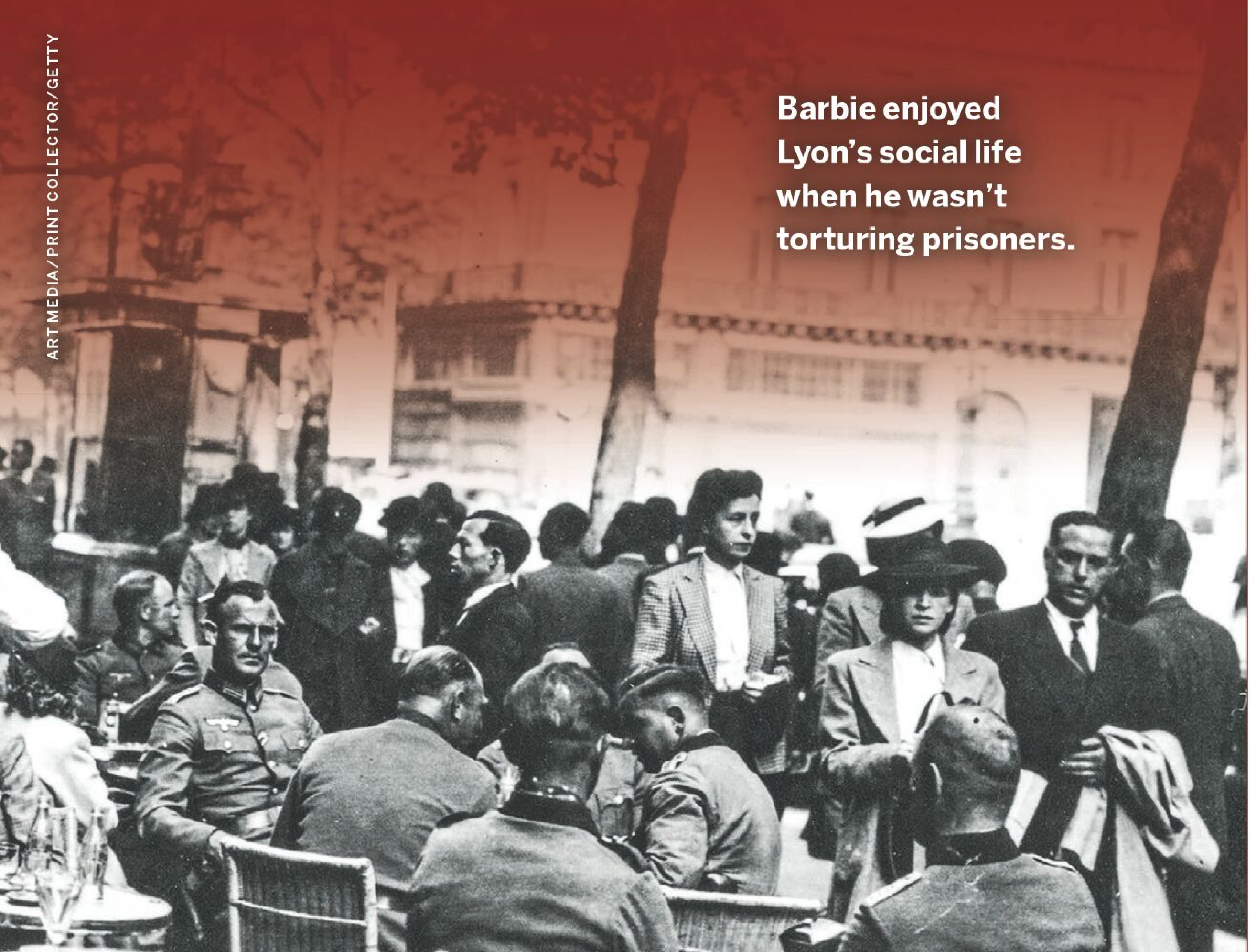
HEMIS/ALAMY/IBL

Children's hideaway: the Jewish orphanage in Izieu, where Barbie found 44 children who he sent to Auschwitz. All were killed just after their arrival.

Gestapo Headquarters Hotel Terminus: the pleasant hotel near the train station was the Gestapo's headquarters. German officers enjoyed drinks at the bar while the prisoners shouted in vain from the torture chambers.

IBL

Barbie's last stop, the airport in Lyon, where he ordered the assassination of the last 109 prisoners before he fled to Germany.



Barbie enjoyed Lyon's social life when he wasn't torturing prisoners.

ART MEDIA/PRINT COLLECTOR/GETTY

SOVFOTO/UIG/GETTY

Personal effects and pictures that belonged to executed civilians in a German extermination camp.

parties, and his fingers danced elegantly over the keys. Obviously, the audience had no idea that a few hours earlier the same fingers had been smeared in blood from their countrymen.

AT THE BEGINNING OF JULY, Moulin was taken to Hotel Terminus for the last time. Barbie asked the same questions again – but Moulin neither could nor would say a single word.

Barbie lost his patience. In pure frustration he struck and kicked the Frenchman with renewed strength until Moulin fainted and fell into a deep coma. The Frenchman's arms, legs and several ribs were broken. Barbie realised that he had lost the battle of wits against Moulin. He dragged the lifeless body into an adjoining room and gathered the other resistance members. The sight of his body would make them talk. They saw Moulin lying lifeless on a sofa. His skin was almost yellow, his breath was heavy and his head wrapped in bandages.

Soon afterwards, Moulin was sent by military train to Frankfurt in Germany, where interrogations would continue. But the train had travelled no further than Metz before the resistance leader Jean Moulin died following an 18-day-long martyrdom.

"WE WERE OVERWHELMED BY THE UNMISTAKABLE ODOUR OF WARM BLOOD"

BARBIE HAD NOT managed to get Moulin to say anything useful, but Hitler was still impressed.

Barbie was awarded Iron Cross 1st Class. The leader of the Free French Forces, General Charles de Gaulle responded from his exile in London by awarding Moulin a posthumous Order of Liberation.

Barbie's focus gradually shifted from ordinary interrogations to sadistic torture sessions and outright mass murder of prisoners.

When Adrien Richard, deputy police chief of Lyon, visited Gestapo headquarters, he barely believed his own eyes.

"We went down into the cellar," he recounted later. "When we got to the corridor, we were ▶

Incarcerated children behind the barbed wire fence in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945.

KEYSTONE-FRANCE\GAMMA-RAPHO/GETTY

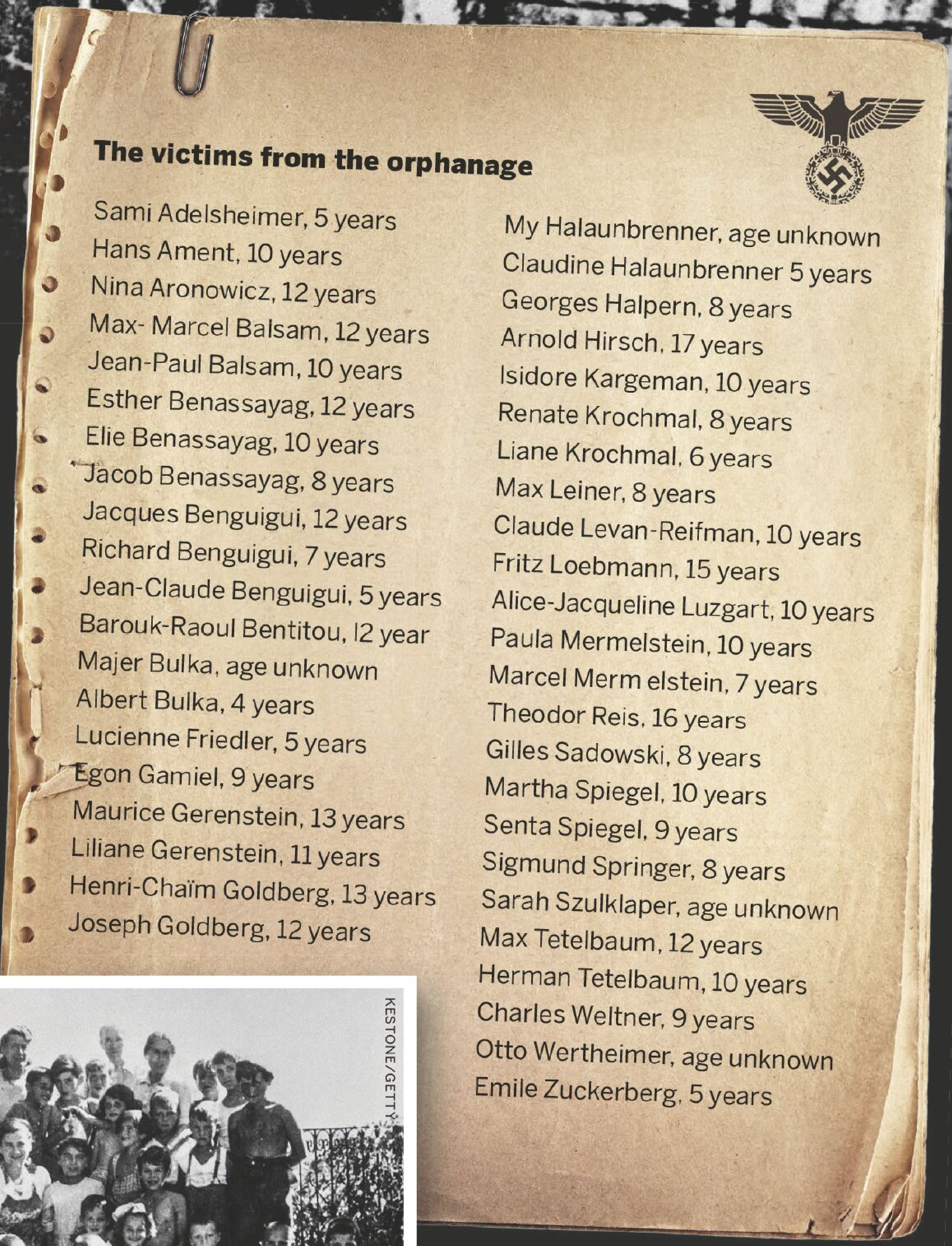
Nazis killed 1.5 million children

Klaus Barbie was not the only one who murdered children during World War II.

★ Barbie was by no means the only one who directed his hatred towards children – and his deportation of Jewish children from Izieu's orphanage was not unique in occupied territories. The Nazis regarded Jewish children as "unproductive" and as representatives of the future of Judaism – a new generation that could avenge the murdered. Therefore, thousands of Jewish children were sent by train to concentration camps, where most were killed in the gas chambers after they arrived.

Many newborns were thrown directly into the crematorium ovens, and several thousand children died because they were exposed to the bestial medical experiments of, among others, ruthless concentration camp doctor Josef Mengele.

After the war, Mengele fled to South America, and he was never held accountable for his war crimes.



The victims from the orphanage

Sami Adelsheimer, 5 years
Hans Ament, 10 years
Nina Aronowicz, 12 years
Max- Marcel Balsam, 12 years
Jean-Paul Balsam, 10 years
Esther Benassayag, 12 years
Elie Benassayag, 10 years
Jacob Benassayag, 8 years
Jacques Benguigui, 12 years
Richard Benguigui, 7 years
Jean-Claude Benguigui, 5 years
Barouk-Raoul Bentitou, 12 year
Majer Bulka, age unknown
Albert Bulka, 4 years
Lucienne Friedler, 5 years
Egon Gamiel, 9 years
Maurice Gerenstein, 13 years
Liliane Gerenstein, 11 years
Henri-Chaïm Goldberg, 13 years
Joseph Goldberg, 12 years
My Halaunbrenner, age unknown
Claudine Halaunbrenner 5 years
Georges Halpern, 8 years
Arnold Hirsch, 17 years
Isidore Kargeman, 10 years
Renate Krochmal, 8 years
Liane Krochmal, 6 years
Max Leiner, 8 years
Claude Levan-Reifman, 10 years
Fritz Loebmann, 15 years
Alice-Jacqueline Luzgart, 10 years
Paula Mermelstein, 10 years
Marcel Merm elstein, 7 years
Theodor Reis, 16 years
Gilles Sadowski, 8 years
Martha Spiegel, 10 years
Senta Spiegel, 9 years
Sigmund Springer, 8 years
Sarah Szulklaper, age unknown
Max Tetelbaum, 12 years
Herman Tetelbaum, 10 years
Charles Weltner, 9 years
Otto Wertheimer, age unknown
Emile Zuckerberg, 5 years

KESTONE/GETTY

The youngest child was four years old, the oldest 17 when Klaus Barbie sent the 44 children from Izieu to their death.

overwhelmed by the unmistakable odour of warm blood. We went further and came to a puddle of congealed blood in front of a cell door. After the door was opened we witnessed an appalling scene: corpses were piled up in a corner of the cell and literally swimming in a sea of blood. They were all young men who had been killed by machine guns as they faced the door. Some were bound together, and I remember that the postman, still in his uniform, had pulled himself up on a chair before being killed."

IN MARCH 1944, 43-year-old Lise Lesevre was arrested by the Gestapo. She was an important courier for the resistance movement and brought a letter for a key resistance member "Didier".

In the basement of Montluc prison she was hung up naked by the screw-levered handcuffs. Then an unbearable ritual of torture and assault began: interrogation, rape, maltreatment, multiple interrogation then another rape, abuse, the same interrogation over and over again.

"Who is Didier? Where is Didier" Barbie would ask constantly, staring icily at Lesevre.

"He was terrifying to see, because he had small eyes, like marbles, that moved constantly," she recalled. Many years later she added: "You had a feeling that a ferocious beast was coming into the cell. It was absolute terror."

Even when Barbie wasn't in her cell, he plagued his prisoners by slapping a rider's crop against his boots as he prowled the basement. In one session, Barbie ordered an assistant to beat Lesevre with a spiked ball hung from a cosh. A vertebra was broken and when she fainted, Barbie called a doctor to revive her. As she awoke, he stood over her with piano music playing in the background. Barbie stroked her hands:

"What you've done is magnificent, my dear," he said. "Nobody has held out as long as you. It's nearly over. I'm very upset, but let's finish... Who is 'Didier'?" Silence.

Barbie played his trump card and brought Lesevre's husband and 15-year-old son in the cell. They were tortured in front of her eyes, but she still said nothing. Thus, Barbie's sadistic toolbox was empty. He hit his prisoner in the face with his fist and shouted in frustration: "I don't want to see this stupid woman anymore! Get rid of her!"

But Barbie's assistants did not kill Lesevre. A German soldier brought coffee to her at night and talked to her reassuringly. The following day she was sent by train to the concentration camp in Ravensbrück. After meeting with Barbie, it almost felt like being released.

Between torture sessions with Lesevre, Barbie was busy searching for the last Jews hiding in Lyon, and on 6th April, 1944, he was ready for his most cynical atrocity of the war.

It was a warm morning at the orphanage on the hills outside Izieu. The children had been sent there by their parents so that they were safe from the Gestapo and concentration camps. Most of the children were Jewish, something ▶

Klaus Barbie joined the Nazi party at 22 years old in 1935 and was recruited to the security service. In 1942 he became the Gestapo chief in Lyon.

WEINSTEIN/EVERETT/IBL

that the orphanage had tried to hide from the German occupying forces. This morning everyone sat in the dining room and drank hot chocolate when two trucks and a passenger car suddenly thundered into the courtyard and came to a sudden stop.

A FEMALE EMPLOYEE realised what was going on and screamed for everyone to run. A group of SS soldiers stormed into the house, tore the screaming children from the arms of the staff and threw them into the truck. The few who managed to get away were quickly brought back crying and carried to the courtyard.

27-year-old Lea Feldblum, managed to flee and hide in the woods. From there she saw everything that happened. In the confusion, a non-Jewish child was also thrown up on the lorry, but he was returned when his identity could be proved using the orphanage's register.

At the same time, Barbie and his assistant Dr Bartelmus stood a stone's throw away and looked on. When the trucks arrived in Lyon, Barbie wrote a short report to the German High Command:

"This morning an end was brought to the activities of the Jewish children's home at Izieu. A total of 41 children aged 3 to 13 were arrested. In addition, the whole of the Jewish population, ten persons including five women, were arrested. No money or other values were found. Transport to Drancy will take place on 7th April 1944." The short note was signed "Barbie".

Drancy was a collection point for arrested French Jews. Children and orphanage staff were forced into dirty cattle wagons at the train station, and then they were driven off to Auschwitz. Shortly after arrival they were murdered in the gas chambers.

On 6th June, 1944, the Allies initiated their invasion of France – D-Day – and while the blood flowed on the Normandy beaches, Klaus Barbie hurried to seize the few remaining Jewish families still in Lyon. Married couple Lagrange and their 13-year-old daughter Simone thought liberation was close at hand when they heard news of the Allies' invasion on the radio in the morning. But shortly after, SS soldiers knocked on the door.

As the small family was being taken away, neighbours closed their windows and ignored their cries for help. It became "a day that started with joy and ended in sadness for us", lamented Simone Lagrange later. The family was accommodated in one of the suites in the hotel. Suddenly Barbie came in, dressed in a stylish grey suit and with a cat in his arms. He smiled at Simone, stroked her cheek and said she was pretty. "He cannot be evil since he loves animals", she thought.

"EVERY DAY HE CAME SMILING INTO THE CELL AND KICKED HER OPEN WOUNDS"

BARBIE WANTED TO KNOW where the family's other two children were. He went straight up to 13-year-old Simone and slapped her. He tugged her hair and boxed her ears. Her parents cried and asked for mercy, but Barbie was ice cold. He placed Simone in isolation at Montluc prison, and during the week that followed, he tortured the little girl as if she were a hardened resistance fighter.

Every day he came smiling into the cell and kicked her open wounds. In the end, Barbie took Simone into her parents' cell and held her swollen bloody face up in front of her mother.

"See, now, what you've done to your daughter", hissed the Gestapo boss menacingly.

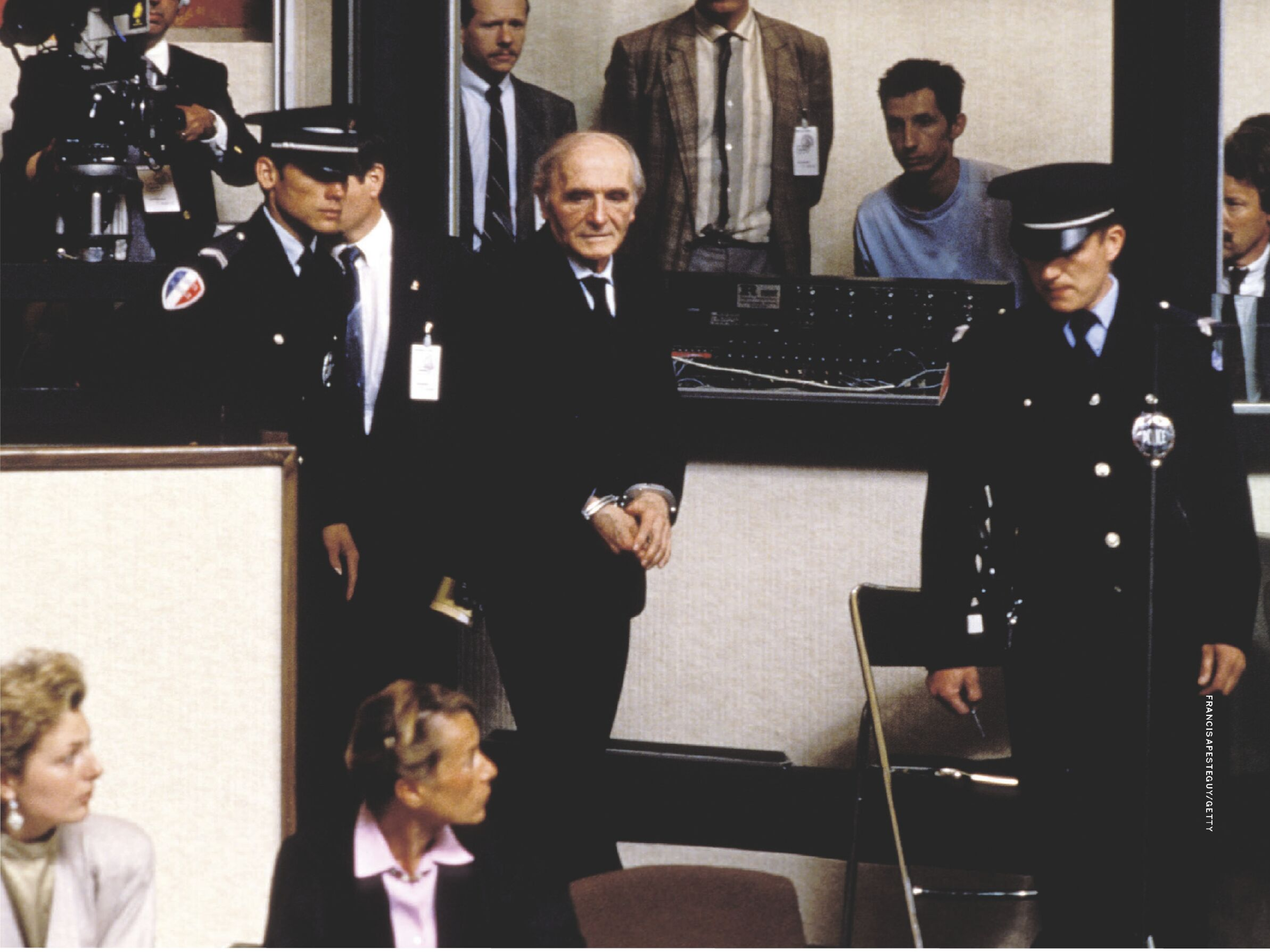
Che Guevara.

BRIDGEMAN/IBL

Butcher of Lyon got new job in US

★ After the war, the US employed Klaus Barbie to hunt communists in Germany. In spite of French pressure to have him extradited, the Americans denied any knowledge of the Nazi.

To hide any embarrassing exposé, they helped Barbie escape to Bolivia. The Nazi helped the CIA and Bolivia's army to murder the guerrilla fighter Che Guevara in 1965.



FRANCIS APESTEGUY/GETTY

But once more Barbie turned out to be an ineffective intelligence officer: the Lagrange family did not give him any information he could use. Soon the whole family was deported to Auschwitz, where they were separated. The mother was gassed to death immediately, while Simone and her father were put to work.

A year later, when the camp was evacuated during the last chaotic days of the war, father and daughter got a glimpse of each other. They almost managed to embrace, but then the father was suddenly ordered to his knees and murdered with a single shot. Against all odds, Simone Lagrange survived to tell her story.

IN MID-AUGUST, as Allied forces approached Lyon, Barbie sent as many prisoners as he could by train eastwards. But he retained 109 Jews and resistance members to use as a human shield when he fled to the airport in Bron on 23rd August.

When the Germans arrived at the plane, Barbie gave the ice-cold order that all hostages be shot and dumped in mass graves. Then he boarded a Luftwaffe plane and left France. The following day, the Allies rolled into Lyon and freed 950 despairing prisoners from Montluc prison. The Gestapo's reign of terror was finally over.

Klaus Barbie deserted after a few months on the Western Front. Then he remained hidden for 38 years – first in Germany and later in South America – with the help of the CIA.

IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1983 that his bloody past finally caught up with him. The former Gestapo executioner was traced by Nazi hunters Serge and Beate Klarsfeld to Bolivia. Then he was extradited to France, where he was convicted of crimes against humanity after a lengthy trial.

During the trial, the extent of Klaus Barbie's crimes came to light. The German murdered or ordered the killings of 4,342 people in the French resistance movement, and he deported 7,591 Jews – men, women and children – to German concentration camps, where most of them died.

Kasper Schlie is a military historian.

On 4th July, 1987 Klaus Barbie was sentenced to life imprisonment. French police led him out of the courtroom in Lyon. Barbie spent four years in jail before he died of leukaemia.

OPPRESSION: *The Kempeitai punished its detractors brutally in Japan and cruelly hunted down members of the resistance in occupied countries.*

GETTY IMAGES

The Kempeitai

JAPAN'S GESTAPO STOPPED AT NOTHING

Everyone feared Japan's military police, the Kempeitai, who rained down pain and death on civilians, resistance fighters and prisoners of war throughout the Far East. Japanese atrocities were among the worst crimes of World War II, yet very few were punished for their offences.

AKG IMAGES

HUMAN TESTING: *The Kempeitai selected prisoners of war to be used in medical experiments.*

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

EXECUTION: *Members of the resistance, prisoners of war and innocent civilians were all killed under the Kempeitai's direction.*

BY TROELS USSING

With a crack, the bamboo stick hit the back of Sybil Kathigasu. The 44-year-old nurse flinched from the pain, but after more than three months in prison, she'd grown accustomed to suppressing her screams when questioned – even though her back was now a mass of wounds after countless blows.

The Malayan woman still hadn't revealed the names of the members of the resistance whom she had helped during the war against Japan in 1943.

"Speak out, you resistance bitch!" cried Sergeant Yoshimura. He struck her again. It was the same method of torture that had led the Japanese to the nurse in the first place. A resistance member had broken down after hundreds of strokes and revealed Kathigasu's identity.

As a sergeant in the Kempeitai, Japan's notorious military police, Yoshimura would stop at nothing in his efforts to uncover conspiracies against the empire. When his beatings failed, he tried another way to loosen the tight-lipped prisoner's tongue: his assistant dragged in Kathigasu's seven-year-old daughter.

From the pole where Kathigasu was tied up, she looked on with horror as Yoshimura wrapped a rope around the girl's frail body and lifted her into a tree. Giant ants from the tree trunk quickly began crawling over the girl, but Yoshimura didn't stop there – the sergeant lit a fire beneath the tree, so the smoke enveloped Kathigasu's daughter, and the flames drew menacingly near to her feet.

"Speak out or I will cut the rope and burn your daughter alive!" Yoshimura screamed at his recalcitrant prisoner.

"No!" Kathigasu answered defiantly. She realised that they would both die, whether she spoke or not. And if she revealed anything, more resistance members would have to go through the same hell that she and her daughter were now enduring.

"Be very brave, Mummy. Do not tell. We will both die and Jesus will wait for us in heaven above," her daughter called out, but her courageous words caused Yoshimura to fly into a rage. He ordered his assistant to cut the rope.

Sergeant Yoshimura's methods were neither unusual nor uniquely cruel ▶

Only the best became Kempei

In order to become a Kempei – a member of the Kempeitai – the applicant had to be a skilled soldier and devoid of compassion.

Requirements: military experience

Applicants needed at least six years military service before they could undertake the year-long Kempei training. The only exception was linguistics experts recruited by the foreign office.

Syllabus: law and espionage

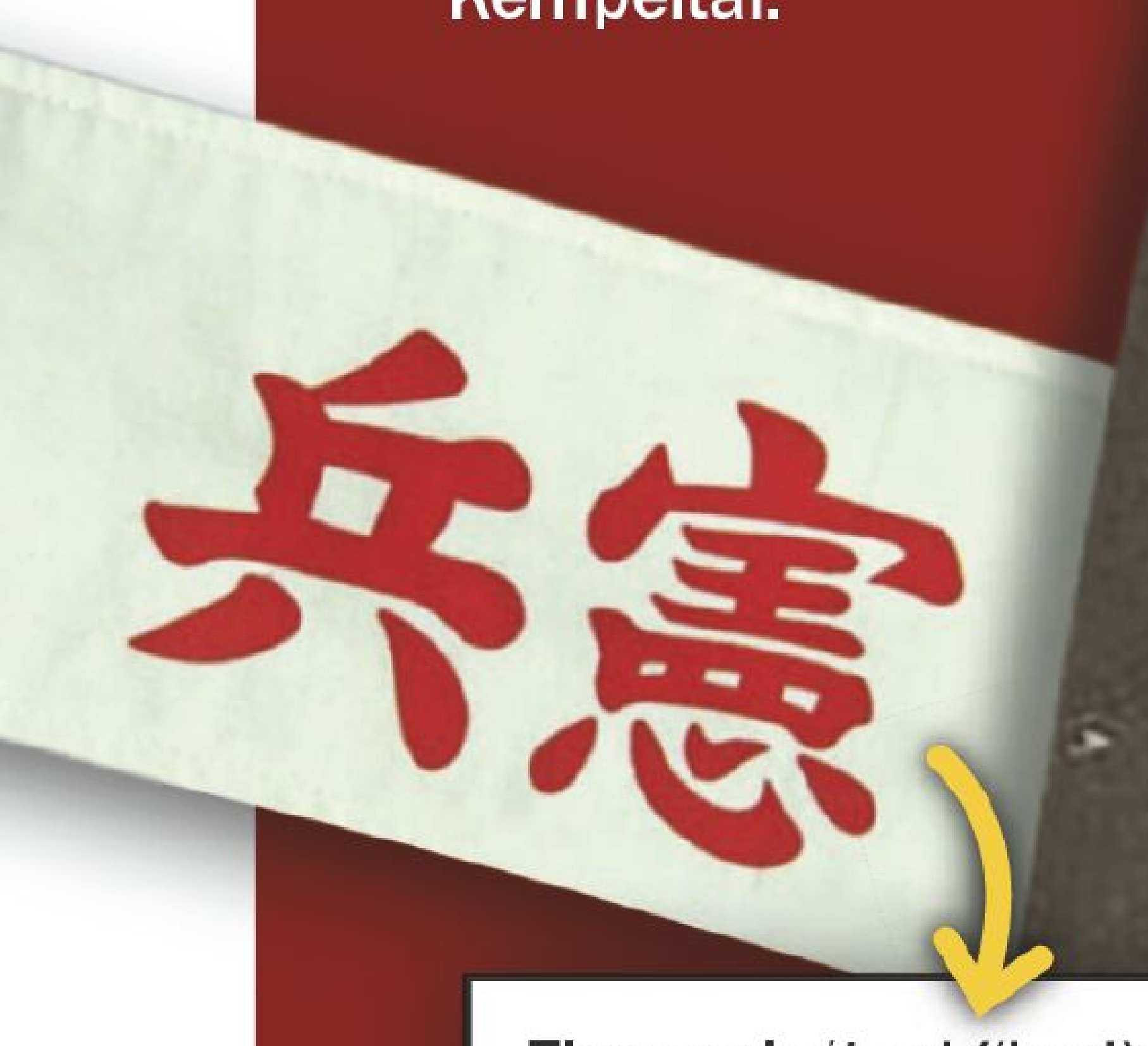
The recruits were taught legal grounds for arresting Japanese citizens, but they were also trained to follow suspects and decipher coded messages.

Self-defence: tough training

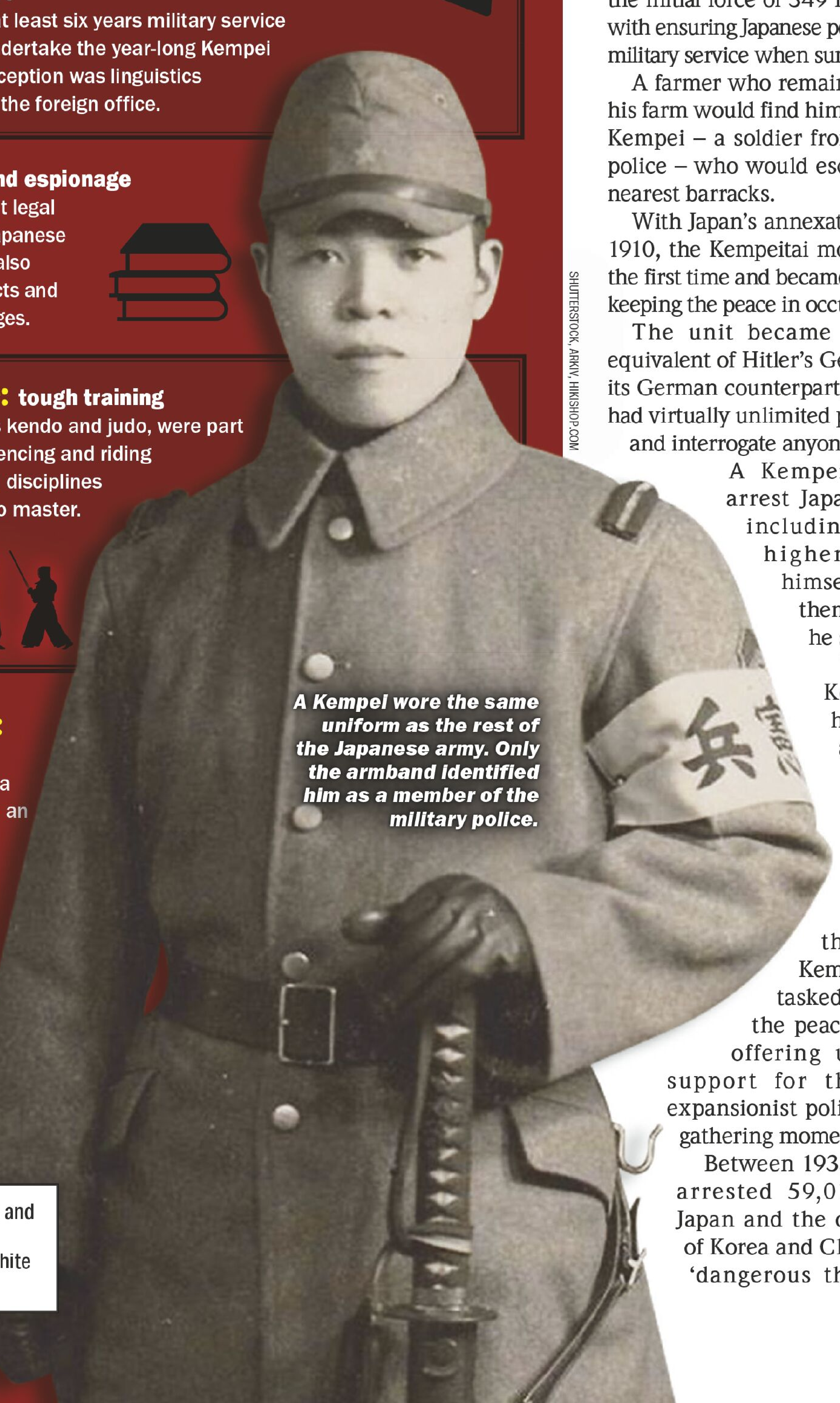
Martial arts, such as kendo and judo, were part of the training, but fencing and riding were also traditional disciplines that a Kempei had to master.

Qualification: armband

After a year's training, a new kempei was given an armband to show he belonged to the Kempeitai.



The words '*ken*' ('law') and '*hey*' ('soldier') were written in red on the white armbands of Kempei.



A Kempei wore the same uniform as the rest of the Japanese army. Only the armband identified him as a member of the military police.

SHUTTERSTOCK, ARKIV, HIKISHOP.COM

compared to other techniques used by Kempei soldiers.

During World War II, the Kempeitai routinely committed atrocities against prisoners of war, members of the resistance and innocent civilians. The horrors continued right up until the last days of the war.

Feared by Japanese officers

When the Kempeitai was established in 1881, no one could predict that it would one day terrorise the entire Far East. The name meant 'Law Soldier Regiment' and the initial force of 349 men was tasked with ensuring Japanese peasants attended military service when summoned.

A farmer who remained at home on his farm would find himself visited by a Kempei – a soldier from the military police – who would escort him to the nearest barracks.

With Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, the Kempeitai moved abroad for the first time and became responsible for keeping the peace in occupied territories.

The unit became the Japanese equivalent of Hitler's Gestapo, and like its German counterpart, the Kempeitai had virtually unlimited powers to arrest and interrogate anyone they wanted.

A Kempei could even arrest Japanese officers, including those of a higher rank than himself, and punish them with lashes if he saw fit.

This is why the Kempeitai was hated and feared among its own ranks. Japan's civilian population didn't feel safe either, because during the 1930s, the Kempeitai was also tasked with keeping the peace at home and offering unconditional support for the country's expansionist policy, which was gathering momentum.

Between 1933-36, the force arrested 59,013 people in Japan and the occupied parts of Korea and China for having 'dangerous thoughts'. And

“All we could do was wait, tense, racked daily by terrible fear”

British journalist in China on the fear induced by the Kempeitai

the Kempeitai’s hunt for state enemies would only increase in scale and brutality.

A striking cobra

The military police soon gained a reputation for being incredibly effective at tracking down wanted people.

Former German officer Walther Stennes, who had fled from Hitler’s Germany to China, was in Shanghai when the Japanese conquered the city in 1937. He likened being suspected by the Kempeitai to being in a darkened room with a cobra, and waiting for it to strike.

He came to the Kempeitai’s attention because he served as an advisor to the Chinese leader, Chiang Kai-shek. When the head of the Kempeitai in Shanghai invited Stennes to dinner, the German didn’t dare refuse.

The Japanese told him that it was fortunate that he’d gone to them voluntarily, because his case file was five centimetres thick, and they had been about to have him killed.

Stennes’s case file was just one among many collected by the Kempeitai who hoarded intelligence like their Gestapo counterparts. From Korea to China and the Philippines, filing cabinets were packed with reports of people suspected of ‘anti-Japanese behaviour’. This information came from the Kempeitai’s tireless shadowing of suspects, phone interceptions and knowledge gathered from informants.

Both in Japan and the occupied territories, the Kempeitai secretly recruited civilians as spies. The luckiest were paid for their efforts, but many worked for free – often under duress because of a strong hold the Kempeitai had over them.

Thousands were forced to report on the conversations and activities of their employers; if they had nothing to tell, they risked being punished themselves for not co-operating. One desperate informant begged his colleague to “give me a piece of paper with something – anything – written on it”, saying that he had to make a report to the Kempeitai that day.

Softened up by the sound of torture

When a case file contained incriminating material, the suspect was arrested and driven to the nearest Kempeitai interrogation centre. During World War II, such centres popped up all over the Japanese empire, invoking terror in the region’s civilians.

British journalist Ralph Shaw described his life in Shanghai when the Kempeitai moved in: “Every day, the news spread of more arrests… All we could do was wait, tense, racked daily by terrible fear, sleepless in our beds as the sound of footsteps anywhere sent us into cold sweats and heart-pounding terror.”

Each Kempeitai interrogation centre was equipped with prison cells and torture chambers. Part of the centres’ psychological torture consisted of allowing detainees in their cells to hear the screams of other prisoners being tortured by a Kempei. New arrivals just sat there, waiting for it to be their turn. During his training in Japan, a Kempei was not taught methods of torture; he learnt them on the job, while the Kempeitai handbook stated that mere “hints of future physical discomforts, for example, torture, murder, starvation, solitary confinement, deprivation of sleep” would be extremely useful during interrogations.

The same handbook also emphasised that the use of “torture, including kicks, punching and anything connected with physical suffering” was allowed in the fight against Japan’s enemies. What form of coercion a Kempei used was up to the individual, but people suspected of being spies or members of the resistance were routinely subjected to torture if they did not immediately reveal everything.

In the autumn of 1943, Malayan nurse Sybil Kathigasu suffered numerous types of torture before her daughter was eventually hung up over a crackling fire. Among other methods, the Kempeitai placed iron bars in a fire, then pressed the red-hot metal against Kathigasu’s bare skin, causing her screams to ring out through the prison. On ▶

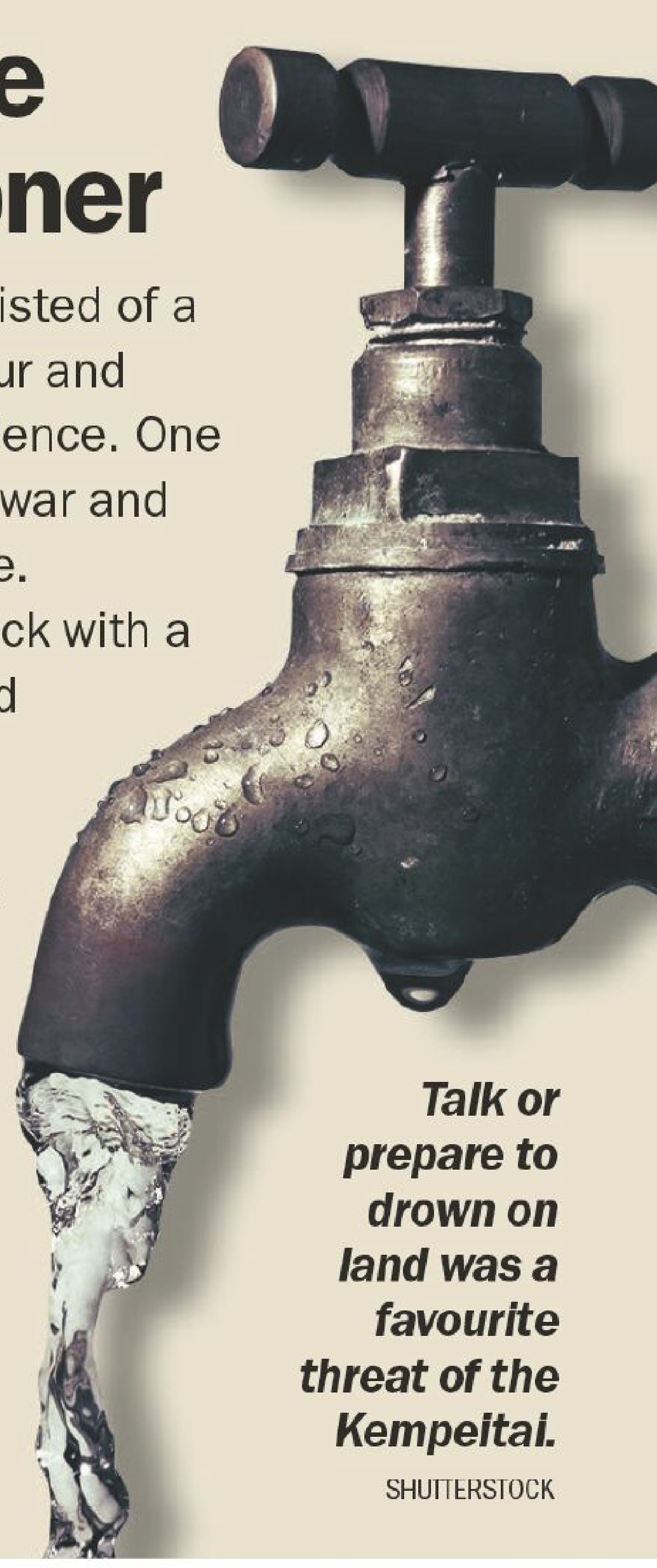
Water torture broke prisoner after prisoner

Interrogations by the Kempeitai often consisted of a series of questions repeated hour after hour and accompanied by some form of physical violence. One particular method used to get prisoners of war and civilians to disclose plans was water torture.

The victim was tied up and laid on his back with a cloth over his face, then the Kempei poured water into his mouth and nostrils.

“Water poured down my windpipe and throat and filled my lungs and stomach. The torrent was unimaginably choking,” recalls Eric Lomax, a Scotsman who fainted during questioning at one of the Kempeitai interrogation centres in Thailand.

The torture was often so brutal that the Kempei had to step on the victim to force the water out again so the prisoner didn’t drown during the interrogation.



Talk or prepare to drown on land was a favourite threat of the Kempeitai.

SHUTTERSTOCK

SHUTTERSTOCK

The Kempeitai singled out victims for human experimentation

By 1935, Japan had built a large plant in occupied Manchuria, in northern China. Here, scientists experimented with chemical and biological warfare.

The Kempeitai was responsible for supplying so-called Unit 731 with prisoners on which the scientists could experiment. If a prisoner was considered unrepentant, worthless or irredeemably anti-Japanese, the Kempeitai transported him to northern China, where a gruesome death awaited. While the victim was still alive, his limbs were cut off to study the effects of blood loss, or he was infected with diseases such as typhoid, cholera or bubonic plague, so that doctors could assess whether Japan should use such biological weapons.

Unit 731 injected toxins into prisoners to assess which chemical agents worked best. Some of the empire's victims ended their days strapped to a target, so that Japanese could assess the most effective range for a flamethrower.

At the end of World War II, the Kempeitai was given responsibility for destroying the plant in northern China and erasing all evidence of the atrocities that had taken place there, but it failed to complete the task before the Soviet troops moved in.

'Worthless' POWs risked ending up as Japanese guinea pigs.

other occasions, the nurse was hung upside down by one leg for hours at a time and had metal splinters pushed under her nails. But Kathigasu never broke – not even when her daughter was about to be burnt in front of her. At the last minute, a high-ranking Kempei came by and stopped Sergeant Yoshimura from carrying out his threat. The daughter was sent home and Kathigasu was thrown into a labour camp.

Sex slaves funded army

In addition to detecting and interrogating suspects, the Kempeitai also engaged in propaganda. Within Japan, the military police praised the army to the skies, leading the population to believe that victory was within reach, right up until the end of the war and Japan's surrender.

In occupied territories, the Kempeitai created posters and produced radio broadcasts that portrayed Japan as a great liberator, who had come to give people a better life.

Behind the scenes, the Kempeitai had another role: scraping money together to pay for the war. Some seized banks, while others demanded protection money in return for not burning down companies' factories and warehouses.

A third source of revenue for the Kempeitai was a huge network of brothels across the empire. Here, Japanese soldiers could satisfy their sexual needs when posted far from home. The bordellos were supposed to raise the morale of the soldiers and were situated both in cities and close to the front line. In some places, railway wagons were even transformed into mobile whorehouses.

Until the early 1930s, the prostitutes working in these brothels were volunteers who desperately needed the money, but as the Japanese started to occupy large parts of Southeast Asia and the fight encompassed many new fronts, the Kempeitai needed to find more and more women to service its soldiers.

Tens of thousands of Asian teens were lured with false promises of a job, or simply abducted and threatened with death if they tried to escape, then placed in the brothels. In Indonesia, the Japanese also took Australian and Dutch girls from prison camps.

"They started to drag us away one by one. And I could hear all the screaming coming from the bedrooms, you know, and you just wait for your turn… And there stood this large, fat, bald Japanese officer looking at me, grinning at me," recalled Dutch national Jan Ruff O'Herne. After a few days, she hacked off all her hair in the hope that the Japanese soldiers would no longer find her attractive and would leave her alone. But it had no effect. The soldiers often queued outside the brothels for hours at a time, and the women were forced to have sex with between 20 and 60 men a day.

One Filipino girl described how she was bleeding so much and in such great pain that she couldn't stand up. With soldiers queuing from 14.00 to 22.00 every day, she didn't even have time to wash herself after each assault.

The soldiers paid two to three yen for a visit to the brothels, and the Kempeitai sent the money to the war department to boost its meagre resources. In total, more than 200,000 women are believed to have been exploited as sex slaves – or "comfort girls", as the Kempeitai called them.

Pacifying prisoners of war

Captive Allied soldiers couldn't escape the Kempeitai either. Although the Japanese army controlled hundreds of prison and labour camps, the military police were responsible for interning prisoners and preventing contact with resistance groups outside the barbed wire fence.

The Japanese were worried about prisoners escaping the camps and sabotaging the supply lines to troops on the front line, which led to even the smallest offences being brutally punished. For example, if prisoners managed to build a radio receiver, the person who hid the device risked being beaten to death, but only after hours of torture, where the Kempeitai would try to get him to reveal his conspirators.

Prolonged periods of being hung upside down, isolation in dark rooms and being burnt with cigarettes were all part of the Kempeitai's regular arsenal, but when facing an enemy who had been cowardly enough to surrender, some Kempei developed particularly brutal torture techniques, as experienced by one Australian lieutenant: "The interviewer produced a small piece of wood like a meat skewer, pushed that into my left ear, and tapped it in with a small hammer. I think I fainted some time after it went through the drum."

The torture often took place within sight of other prisoners in the camp – to scare them as much as possible and disuade them from making plans to escape, trying to talk to locals through the barbed wire fence or doing anything forbidden.

British military doctor Ken Adams was forced to watch a comrade being beaten to death by the Kempeitai in a Japanese prison camp in Thailand: "The beating lasted a long time. I can't say how long, but the bastards knew how to prolong his torture and didn't want him to die too quickly. I can still hear those screams. If the purpose of the violence was to provide an object lesson in why not to build and operate a radio, it was very effective."

Covering their tracks

While the war was going well for Japan, the Kempeitai didn't worry about how many victims were tortured to death, but when the tide turned, they began destroying the evidence. On 15th August 1945, when Emperor Hirohito announced on the radio that Japan had surrendered, large bonfires were lit outside interrogation centres throughout the empire. Case files were thrown into the flames in an attempt to destroy any trace of the years of atrocities. Eventually, the Kempei threw their white armbands into the flames, too, and while the evidence turned to ash, they drove away from the interrogation centres and prison camps to disappear.

US sources estimate that by the end of the war, their numbers had swelled to "70,000 Kempei of all ranks, 24,000 of whom are officers", but very few were ever prosecuted due to a lack of evidence. However, victims who had survived the military police's brutal war crimes were able to identify and testify against those who had been captured by Allied troops.

In Malaysia, 35 Kempei were tried. Nurse Sybil Kathigasu was one of the many victims who, in February 1946, took to the witness stand and told of the barbaric and illegal treatment she'd endured at the hands of Sergeant Yoshimura.

29 of the 35 accused Kempei from the Malaysian camps were hanged for their crimes. Yoshimura was one of them.

Mass murder crushed resistance

The Kempeitai conducted several massacres across the empire. One of the worst public mass executions was aimed at deterring Indonesians from helping Allied resistance groups.

Shooting was among the more humane execution methods used by the Kempeitai.
SHUTTERSTOCK

In the spring of 1942, Japanese forces captured around 200 British and Dutch nationals on the Indonesian island of Java. The Europeans had been waging guerrilla warfare against the Japanese occupying power, and the Kempeitai decided to set an example before others were tempted to join the freedom fighters. Each prisoner was squeezed into a small basket, ordinarily used by locals to transport pigs. Four or five trucks then drove the baskets towards the coast. The prisoners were given nothing to drink in the burning sun, and became increasingly thirsty as the trucks travelled to the port of Surabaya. In front of the shaken Indonesian locals, the Kempeitai sailed the prisoners out to sea, then toppled basket after basket into the water, drowning the captives.

According to the plan, 3,300 German troops wearing American uniforms were to capture the bridges over the river Meuse.

RITZAU SCANPIX & SHUTTERSTOCK/COLLAGE HISTORIE

Hitler's final ace in the hole:

SOLDIERS IN DISGUISE

As Hitler planned his last offensive through the Ardennes against the Allies in December 1944, he secretly summoned the army's greatest commanding officer. Otto Skorzeny had freed Mussolini from captivity the year before, and now he had to lead a brigade deep behind enemy lines – disguised as American soldiers.

By Kasper Tonsberg Schlie & Niels-Peter Granzow Busch

The soldiers of the US Army military police had no suspicions about the three compatriots they'd just stopped in a Jeep near the Belgian village of Aywaille. The day before, 16th December 1944, the German Army had surprised the Allies with a major offensive through the Ardennes. Thousands of American troops were in retreat, and they all had to go through a series of checkpoints on the route west.

Addressing the three men in the Jeep, one MP asked for that day's password. In English, the Jeep's driver, who called himself Charles Lawrence, replied that they hadn't been told. However, the MPs had no intention of letting the trio off so easily. They ordered the men out of the vehicle, then searched the Jeep. There, among other items, they found a German machine gun, explosives and lots of counterfeit dollar bills.

The discovery prompted the astonished military police to frisk the soldiers, who – despite their ordinary appearance – turned out to be anything but regular American GIs. Under the olive-green American uniform, the three men wore the German Army's grey regimentals, and three ID cards from the German Wehrmacht revealed that the men were actually named Günther Billing, Wilhelm Schmidt and Manfred Pernass. During an hour-long interrogation, the three men admitted that they were German commandos sent by Otto Skorzeny himself – Nazi Germany's uncrowned master of operations. And they were far from alone. According to the prisoners, several disguised German units had infiltrated behind Allied lines. Some had to capture the bridges over the River Meuse, while other units were on their way to Paris. When the interrogators inquired about the ▸

mission in Paris, the hairs on the back of their necks rose – according to prisoner Wilhelm Schmidt, the aim of the disguised commandos was to kill the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower.

Hitler's last offensive

The idea for Nazi Germany's most daring commando operation, dubbed Operation Greif, was hatched by Adolf Hitler himself in the autumn of 1944. On 22nd October, he invited SS officer Otto Skorzeny to his headquarters, Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair). The 36-year-old Austrian was greatly respected by the Führer after carrying out several spectacular commando operations.

Hitler revealed a plan to Skorzeny that he'd been secretly working on since the Allied landings in Normandy, four months earlier. The Führer explained that Germany was under pressure on every front and had just one chance left to turn the war around.

A large-scale winter offensive through the Ardennes to the west was to divide the US and British forces, and recapture the port of Antwerp in Belgium, from where the Allies received vital supplies. The goal was to slow the Americans' advance and give the Nazis time to throw the full force of their newly developed wonder weapons at the enemy. Hitler's hope was that he could thereby secure a peace deal in the west and thus be able to send all his forces to battle the Soviets in the east.

If the Ardennes offensive was to be successful, it required German troops to reach Antwerp within a week – so Hitler needed Skorzeny. On the way to Antwerp, German troops had to cross the Meuse, but if the Americans destroyed the bridges over the river, they'd be able to gather their strength and mount an effective defence. It couldn't be allowed to happen.

IMAGESELECT

German soldier Günther Billing (right), along with two others, was captured wearing US uniforms behind enemy lines.

"One of the most important tasks in this offensive will be entrusted to you and the units under your command, which will have to go ahead and seize one or more of the bridges over the Meuse," Hitler explained, according to Skorzeny's memoirs.

The Führer's plan was for Skorzeny to set up a special unit: Panzer Brigade 150, with 3,300 men. There was one catch: "You will have to wear British and American uniforms," said Hitler.

Lack of English-speakers

According to the Führer's plan, which was known to only a few, Skorzeny's brigade was to be equipped with Allied weapons and vehicles to trick the enemy and reach the bridges that lay over a hundred kilometres behind the front line. Once there, the disguised units also had to create chaos by cutting telephone lines, removing mine warnings and taking away road signs so that Allied troops would become lost.

Skorzeny knew the mission had little chance of success, but the Führer's words were law, so he immediately set about forming his armoured brigade. After meeting with Hitler, he travelled to the headquarters of the new brigade at Grafenwöhr, in southern Germany. By the time he arrived, the High Command had already sent an order to all units: everyone who spoke fluent English was to report "for special tasks on the Western Front".

Skorzeny had not been informed of the order beforehand, and rightly feared it would be intercepted by the enemy.

"I was almost choked with rage," Skorzeny wrote in his book.

He was right in his prediction: a month later, the Allies heard about the special order – but, luckily for the Germans, nothing was done about it.

However, there was a good response to the High Command's order. Within a week, 600 volunteers showed up at the barracks. However, Skorzeny's mood took another dive when his language

The Ardennes offensive was Hitler's idea. Here, he plans the attack with Göring.

GETTY IMAGES

experts reported that just 10 of them spoke fluent English, 40 spoke the language reasonably well, while 150 could make themselves understood when needed. The majority could in no way pass as Americans.

"200 spoke broken English and another 200 could answer yes or no," wrote Skorzeny. "It was therefore impossible to form an 'English-speaking brigade'."

Wrong uniforms

Skorzeny chose instead to ask the army command to set up a commando company with the 120 soldiers who spoke the best English, while the rest of the troops were to avoid speaking to the enemy. Together with experienced commandos from his own SS unit, paratroopers and regular tank units, the brigade was able to muster about 2,500 soldiers.

Skorzeny had demanded that almost the entire brigade be equipped with captured American vehicles: 20 Sherman tanks, 247 Jeeps, 32 armoured personnel carriers and 193 trucks. When the equipment arrived, the Austrian was furious once again. Skorzeny received only a third of the vehicles requested, and much of the equipment wasn't American at all, but Soviet. According to Skorzeny, the tanks were completely wrong:

"I received two, [only] one of which was in working order."

Instead, the brigade had to camouflage 12 German Panther tanks, so they resembled American ones. When Skorzeny saw the results, however, he was not impressed:

"[They] might perhaps be able to fool the young American soldiers from a distance and in ... poor visibility."

The camouflage consisted of painting the tanks and other vehicles in the Americans' olive-green field paint, as well as applying the characteristic white star to them. The troops also shortened the tanks' gun barrels and welded tin plates on the turrets, giving them a more 'American' shape.

However, the deception created the obvious risk of the tanks being shelled by their own side. Skorzeny therefore demanded that a small, yellow triangle be placed on the rear of all the vehicles. In the case of visual contact with their own side, the tank crews were told to ▶

In 1940, the bridge over the Juliana Canal in the Netherlands was occupied by Brandenburgers dressed in Dutch uniforms.

Special unit tricked the enemy again and again

Before the Ardennes offensive, Nazi Germany had deployed commandos in fake uniforms on almost every front with great success.

Skorzeny's wasn't the first German unit to sneak behind enemy lines in disguise. As early as 1939, the Abwehr intelligence service, under Admiral Canaris, established a top-secret unit that came to be based in the town of Brandenburg an der Havel that gave them their name Brandenburgers.

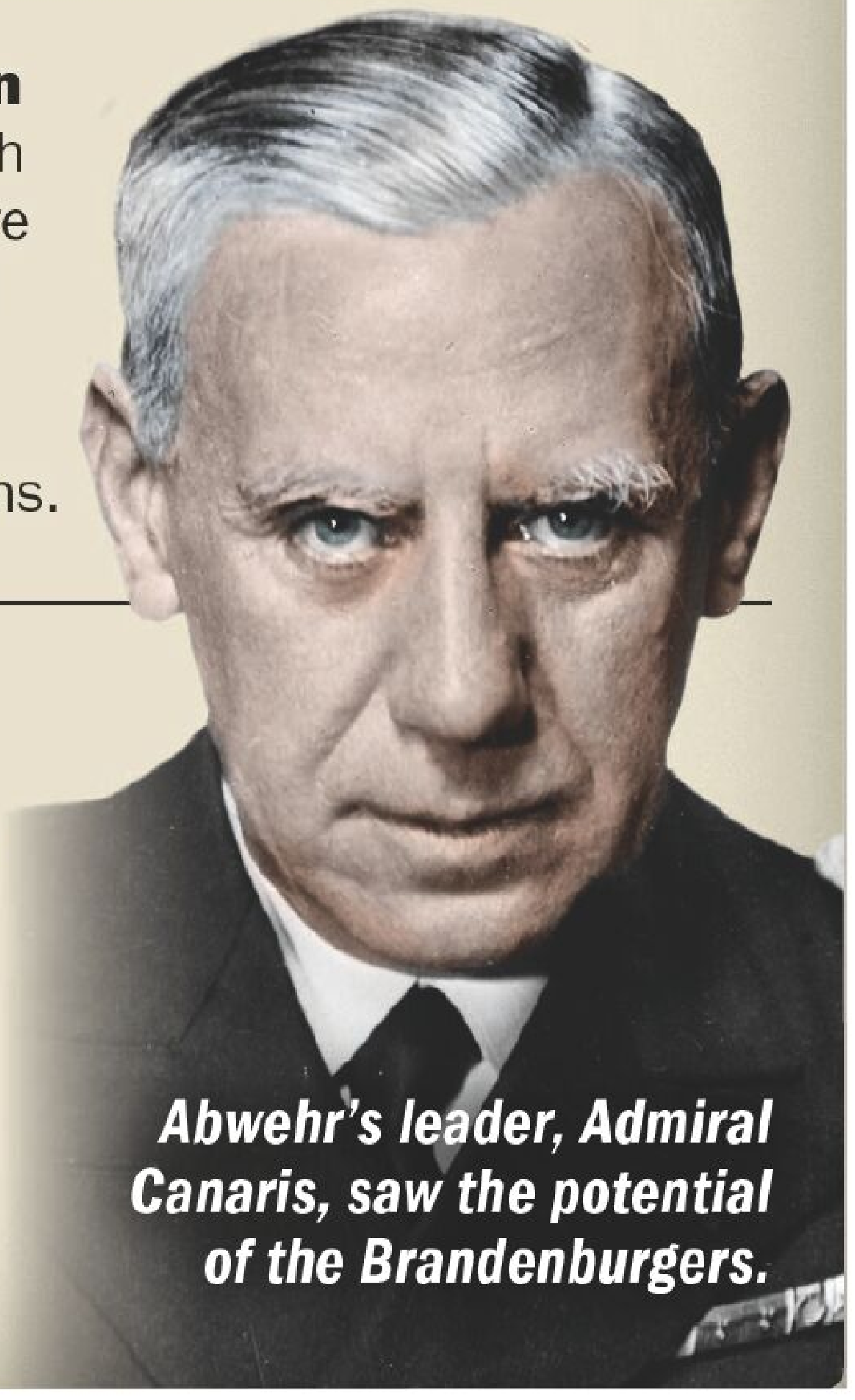
The recruits received advanced combat training and were trained to infiltrate enemy units in disguise. The majority were ethnic Germans, or *volksdeutsche,* from other countries, and could speak several languages. When Hitler shut down the Abwehr service in February 1944 on suspicion of treason, the Brandenburgers were also disbanded. Many of the unit's troops ended up in a new special unit instead: the 502nd SS Hunter Battalion, which was led by Skorzeny.

Before then, however, the secretive Brandenburgers managed to play a crucial role in a long line of offensives.

On 10th September 1939, the German invasion of Poland was in full swing. A Polish unit stubbornly defended a strategically important railway bridge at Demblin. Suddenly, another Polish unit appeared to replace the troops and take over the defence. After the handover, the fresh troops removed their uniforms; they were Polish-speaking Germans from the unit that would later become known as the Brandenburgers.

During the invasion of the **Netherlands in 1940,** Brandenburgers disguised as Dutch sailors sailed into the country on barges. Others wore Dutch uniforms and captured a number of important bridges and intersections. Out of 61 targets in the Netherlands and Belgium, Brandenburgers secured 42, clearing a path for the German armoured divisions.

In August 1942, the Brandenburgers were among the Germans who reached the east during the war against the Soviet Union; 62 Russian-speaking commandos drove a column of Soviet trucks all the way to the town of Maykop in the North Caucasus, home to an important oil field. Disguised as Soviet intelligence officers, they were politely shown around the city's defences before ordering Soviet units to leave the area.



Abwehr's leader, Admiral Canaris, saw the potential of the Brandenburgers.

LAWRENCE PATERSON & GETTY IMAGES

turn their gun barrels to '9 o'clock', while disguised soldiers in the same situation had to remove their helmets – something no soldier would do in the face of the enemy.

The situation was not much better in terms of uniforms. Instead of US ones, they received bits of British uniforms.

Skorzeny then received a shipment of American overcoats, all of which had triangular patches sewn on, indicating that the uniforms came from Allied soldiers in German prisoner of war camps. Skorzeny summed up the situation: "It was an eloquent comment on the way the business was handled that the commander of the brigade – myself – got nothing but an American army pullover in my size!"

The lack of equipment eroded the morale of the new brigade, which didn't even know what the mission's goal was. Only Skorzeny was aware of Hitler's plan. The secrecy caused rumours to fly. Captain Stielau, commander of the battalion's special commando company, demanded a meeting at Skorzeny's office to confirm his suspicions.

"I know what our mission really is: we are supposed to capture General Eisenhower," Stielau proclaimed.

Instead of dismissing the rumour, Skorzeny dashed to the open door to see if anyone else was nearby: "My dear fellow, please speak quietly. You have hit the mark. But not a word to anyone – this is most important."

"You can count on my absolute silence," replied Stielau. "But allow me to say that I know Paris and its surroundings like my vest pocket, and I can be really useful if the need arises."

Skorzeny's attempt to mislead those closest to him was intended to ensure that any rumours that did reach the Allies were about anything other than the impending offensive. However, stories of Eisenhower's kidnapping were to have unexpected consequences.

Elite unit became spearhead

Captain Stielau didn't have the faintest idea what the mission was really about, but he'd been chosen to lead the armoured brigade's spearhead – a commando company of 120 soldiers who were to drive in small, autonomous teams to the bridges over the Meuse. Here they were to reconnoitre and note where the Americans had placed their explosive charges and machine gun positions. On the way back to the German lines, the teams had to wreak as much havoc as possible.

What became known as the Stielau unit consisted of Germans who could

OTTO SKORZENY

Bold missions made Skorzeny famous – and infamous – worldwide.

WALTER FRENTZ COLLECTION/
SCALA ARCHIVES

Skorzeny was "Europe's most dangerous man"

The name Otto Skorzeny sent a chill running down any Allied soldier's back. In 1944, a US intelligence service described the Austrian as "the most dangerous man in Europe" – and for good reason. Skorzeny was the most famous commando of the Third Reich and was notorious for his spectacular operations around Europe.

MISSION DETAILS

FLOOD MOSCOW

Location: Soviet Union **Year:** 1941

During the Battle of Moscow, Skorzeny fought in the Waffen-SS and one of his orders was to capture the locks along the Moscow-Volga Canal after invading the city, because Hitler hoped to flood Moscow. It never happened because the city held out. It was during the fighting in Russia that Skorzeny got a taste for special operations.

For over three months, Moscow withstood Hitler's troops.

MISSION DETAILS

STOP SUPPLIES

Location: Iran **Year:** 1943

Skorzeny's commando unit – the 502nd SS Hunter Battalion – was sent to Iran. Large quantities of Allied munitions were shipped through Iran to the Soviet Union, so Skorzeny's men collaborated with local tribes to carry out sabotage operations. However, the Germans ran out of gold to offer the tribes, so the mission had to be stopped.

Huge quantities of munitions were taken through Iran to the Soviet Union.

speak fluent US English, use slang, and answer simple questions about the United States, on subjects such as baseball, politics or state capitals.

"In the few weeks at our disposal, we could hardly hope to teach them their jobs properly," Skorzeny wrote.

Still, Skorzeny did his best to train the soldiers. The Stielau unit was the only group in Panzer Brigade 150 to be trained in all facets of special operations: explosives, radio technology and the study of enemy uniforms and weapons. The 120 soldiers were even sent to prison camps in Küstrin and Limburg to talk to US soldiers for hours so they could learn the latest slang.

Stielau's troops had to look American from head to toe: they got the best uniforms, the latest Jeeps, and US weapons, such as M1 carbines and Colt pistols. Thousands of dollars were to be used to bribe the locals – or to escape the clutches of the Americans. The unit had to be indistinguishable from US soldiers, so Skorzeny invented a clever method of recognising them. The Stielau soldiers weren't allowed to fasten the second highest button on their coat, and were ordered to wear a discreet red or blue scarf.

The Stielau unit was further divided into three main groups: a demolition group, a reconnaissance group and a commando group, each of which was divided into smaller units of three to six men. The demolition units had the task of destroying the enemy's fuel depots, while the reconnaissance units were to drive into enemy territory and check out the bridges over the Meuse.

These units were also supposed to sabotage the enemy's communication lines and trick the Allied troops into following the wrong routes. Finally, the commando units were to accompany the regular German troops and create confusion among the fleeing Americans.

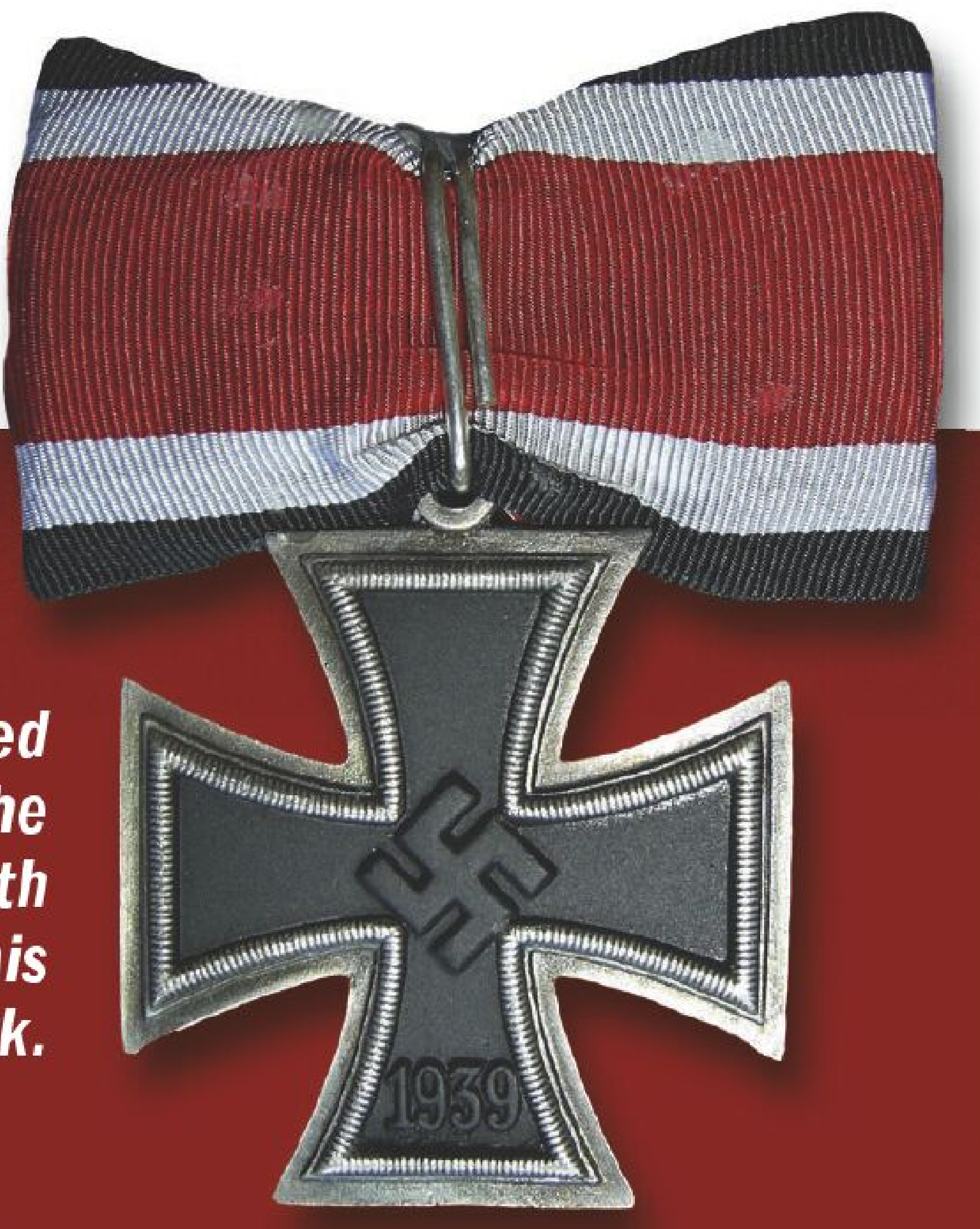
Behind enemy lines

Shortly before the Ardennes offensive, Skorzeny was called to a final briefing by Hitler. The brigade leader told the Führer that despite having to improvise from start to finish, they'd do their best.

The Führer listened and gave Skorzeny a final order: "I … know that it is your style to be at the head of your men. In this case I expressly forbid you to cross our lines. … You will not leave your command post and will direct 'Operation Greif' from there by radio. I don't want you to run the risk of being captured."

However, the offensive had to be postponed several times due to the weather; without low cloud cover, the Allied air forces would quickly bomb the Germans into retreat. On Saturday 16th December, the weather was finally perfect. At 05.30, 1,600 German guns launched a massive bombardment.

When the smoke settled, three armoured divisions attacked through ▶



Hitler awarded Skorzeny the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves for his impressive work.

MISSION DETAILS

FREE MUSSOLINI

Location: Italy **Year:** 1943

After the Allied invasion of Sicily, Mussolini fell out of favour with the king of Italy and was imprisoned in a hotel on the Gran Sasso massif. Hitler ordered an operation to liberate him, and Skorzeny quickly worked out where Mussolini was being held captive. Along with 100 German commandos in gliders, he stormed the remote hotel and flew away with the dictator in a small propeller plane.

Skorzeny
Mussolini

The liberation of Mussolini made Skorzeny well known to all parties in the war.

MISSION DETAILS

BREAK HUNGARY'S LEADER

Location: Hungary **Year:** 1944

For years, Hungary had fought side by side with Germany, but in 1944, the country's leader, Horthy, began peace talks with the Soviet Union. Hitler promptly sent Skorzeny to Budapest, where he kidnapped Horthy's son. Then Skorzeny drove to Buda Castle and forced Horthy to appoint a pro-German head of state.

Hungary's leader, Horthy, sided with Hitler, but in the last year of the war, tried to escape the alliance – in vain.

RITZAU SCANPIX & GETTY IMAGES & BRUCE MARVIN

the hilly terrain of the Ardennes. Immediately, Skorzeny's highly mobile Stielau unit raced around the main forces and penetrated further behind enemy lines via small forest roads.

Nine small units with a total of 44 disguised soldiers went off, each with their own target, the most important of which were the Meuse bridges in the Belgian cities of Amay, Huy and Andenne, over 100 kilometres away. Only when the units had passed their own troops and were alone behind enemy lines, did they put their US uniforms on over their German ones:

"For our driver this was a real feat of acrobatics performance, as it was impossible for us to stop and he had to carry out his undressing act while we were on the move," Sergeant Heinz Rohde explained after the war.

He was a member of one of four reconnaissance groups tasked with reaching the Meuse bridges.

Soon after donning their disguises, the team saw the first enemy troops. An American sergeant tried with shouts and gestures to make them turn around – probably in the belief that they were US troops fleeing from the front. But Rohde and his group drove past without stopping. Shortly afterwards, further down the road, they saw a military policeman: "An Ami [American] as tall as a tree was standing there. ... With a motorcycle carelessly thrown beside him, he pulled us on to a side road and the artillery fire falling on the main road ahead convinced us that his efforts were directed towards protecting us from it."

> "English-speaking Germans had infiltrated us"
>
> INTELLIGENCE OFFICER TO GENERAL OMAR BRADLEY

Rohde and his men thanked the MP and hurried on. Apparently, the disguises and the soldiers' language training convinced the Americans, but their success was also due to luck: "We thought at first that every Ami could spot us as Germans from a thousand metres away," said one soldier, when he was interrogated after the war. "But the shelling, the poor light and the confusion of the opposition helped us through those first tense hours."

Traffic jam stopped brigade

While Skorzeny's commando units raced against time to reach the River Meuse, Panzer Brigade 150 ran into trouble. It was supposed to stay behind the rest of the divisions until they reached the hills. Then, the brigade's approximately 2,000 men were to drive as quickly as possible through enemy territory, capture the Meuse bridges and hold them until the main German troops arrived. However, this plan required the main troops to actually manage to break through the front line.

In some places, the Germans broke through quickly, but around noon, it became clear that the front line was still holding. The enemy's strength, narrow muddy roads and poor visibility created a German traffic jam that, at some points, was 30 kilometres long.

"The narrow roads were clogged with every type vehicle, and I had to cover 10 km on foot," wrote Skorzeny.

By the end of the day, the troops ahead of Panzer Brigade 150 had only advanced about five kilometres from the original front. The next morning, Skorzeny could see that the situation was unchanged: "I made my way to the front. ... The roads were now completely clogged. There was no more talk of reaching the Meuse bridges!"

According to the plan, Panzer Brigade 150 should have captured the bridges by the second day of the offensive. Any later and the element of surprise would have been lost. The Austrian therefore made a difficult decision at the end of day two:

"After informing the Wehrmacht operations staff (Jodl) and obtaining his consent, I placed my brigade at the disposal of 1 Panzer Corps."

The brigade's 2,000 Germans were now to fight as ordinary soldiers – but with fake US weapons and vehicles. However, Skorzeny didn't cancel the Stielau unit's

While Skorzeny's troops were stuck in a traffic jam, other German units initially had great success.

GETTY IMAGES

missions, as they could continue to be a great help to the offensive. The commandos therefore carried on relentlessly behind enemy lines.

Commandos tricked enemy

During the first 24 hours of the offensive, two of Skorzeny's disguised reconnaissance units reached the River Meuse. Led by Captain Fritz Bussinger, one of the groups drove into the town of Huy, where, on foot, they observed that the bridge over the Meuse hadn't yet been laid with American explosive devices. The group informed their command via radio about the situation.

Just as Bussinger was about to leave town, he was accosted by a US officer at the head of an armoured column. The tanks were supposed to heading towards the town of Marche, but Bussinger informed the officer that the Germans had captured the roads leading to the town, and he then sent the unsuspecting US armoured column in a completely different direction.

"Our radio monitoring service confirmed that the headquarters of the American 1st Army searched in vain for this unit for two days," Skorzeny wrote.

On the way back to the German lines, Bussinger's unit cut telephone cables and removed road signs. According to Skorzeny, another German vehicle crossed the Meuse at Amay: "Its occupants placed red banners to indicate that the roads to the front had been mined."

Several US Army columns therefore had to turn around and take lengthy detours towards the front line. On 17th December, a group of disguised Germans even stopped at a crossroads and the leader climbed on to his bonnet to point the entire 16th US Infantry Regiment in the wrong direction. US Sergeant Keoghan reached the scene after the Germans had left and spoke to an MP who had seen them:

"He said that when they got [there], two of the men were still directing the outfit down the wrong road. When they saw the MPs coming, they hauled out so fast that one of them couldn't get into the Jeep. He was standing on the front bumper hanging on to the wire-cutter. And they went down the road as fast as the Jeep would go."

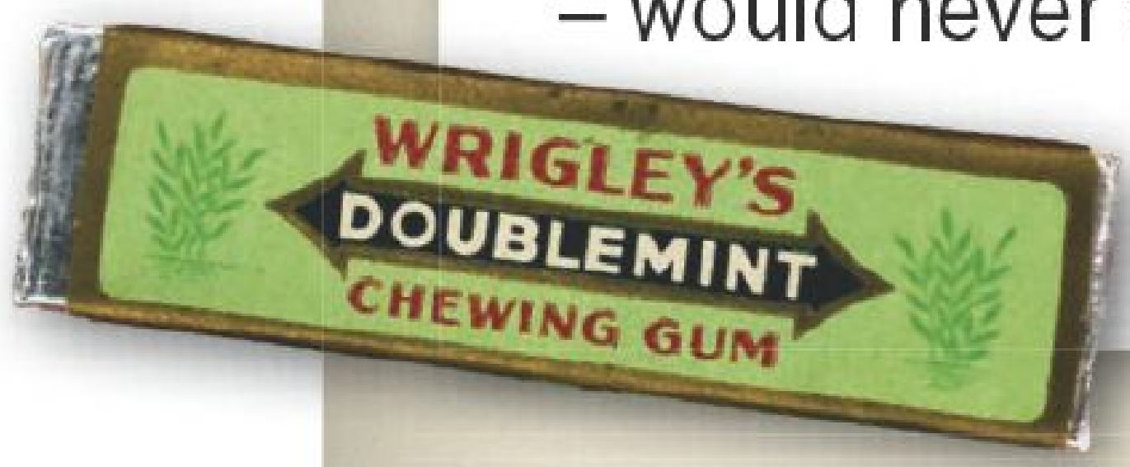
But not every group was successful in fooling the Americans. On the second day of the offensive, the unit comprising Günther Billing and his two comrades was captured, and soon after, things went wrong for another of the Stielau units. A Jeep containing four Germans drove up to a fuel depot, where one of them said in English: "Petrol please."

The soldier at the depot immediately became suspicious, because an American would say "gas" and would be unlikely to say "please".

The American's mistrust caused the driver to race off at high speed, and shortly after, hit a truck. The Germans were captured and interrogated. In accordance with what the other captured unit had said, they confessed what they believed to be true, causing panic among half a million Allied soldiers: thousands of disguised Germans were operating behind the front line, some of whom were tasked with assassinating Eisenhower. The information was promptly sent to the Allied High Command in Paris.

Panic in France

A simple story from seven Germans in American uniforms had major consequences. That same day, ▶

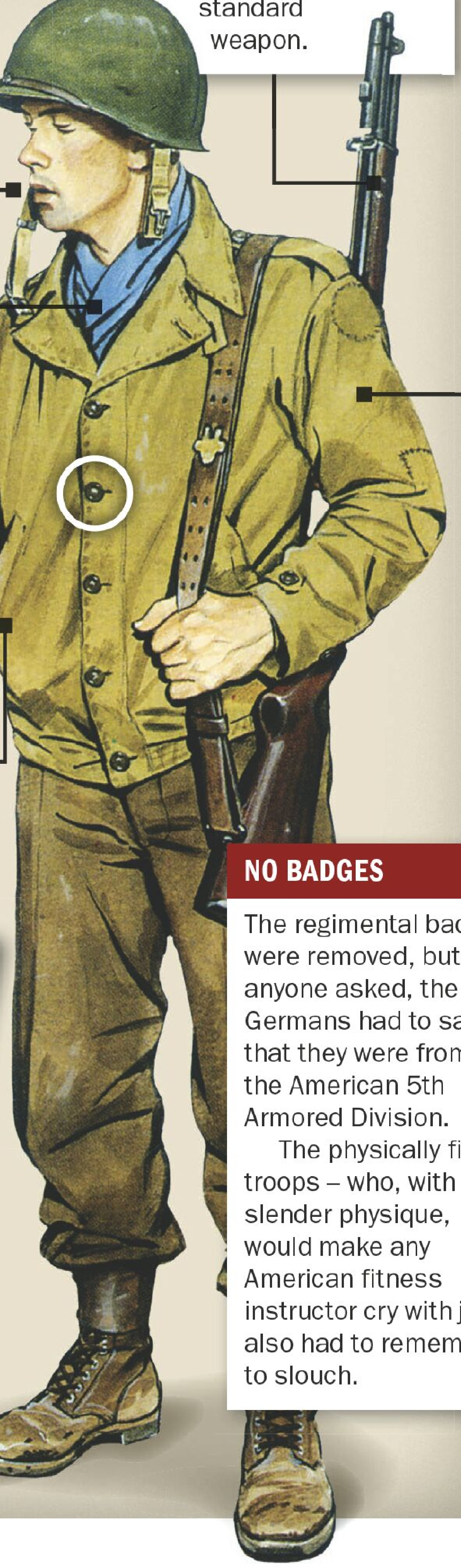


CHEWING GUM

A German soldier – unlike an American – would never chew gum. Something Skorzeny's men had to learn to do.

WEAPON

Skorzeny's troops were armed with the M1 carbine, the American infantry's standard weapon.



OSPREY PUBLISHING & IMAGESELECT

SCARF

Other German units were able to recognise the commando troops by their blue or red scarf and unfastened second button on their jacket.

HIDDEN EQUIPMENT

The small commando teams had a secret box in their Jeep. Here they kept counterfeit dollars for bribes, explosives, German weapons and their real ID cards.

LUCKY STRIKE

Skorzeny's men were given US Lucky Strike cigarettes. They had to practise opening the pack like an American, and only smoke two thirds of a cigarette, like US soldiers.

LUCKY
STRIKE
CIGARETTES
L.S./M.F.T.

NO BADGES

The regimental badges were removed, but if anyone asked, the Germans had to say that they were from the American 5th Armored Division.

The physically fit troops – who, with their slender physique, would make any American fitness instructor cry with joy – also had to remember to slouch.

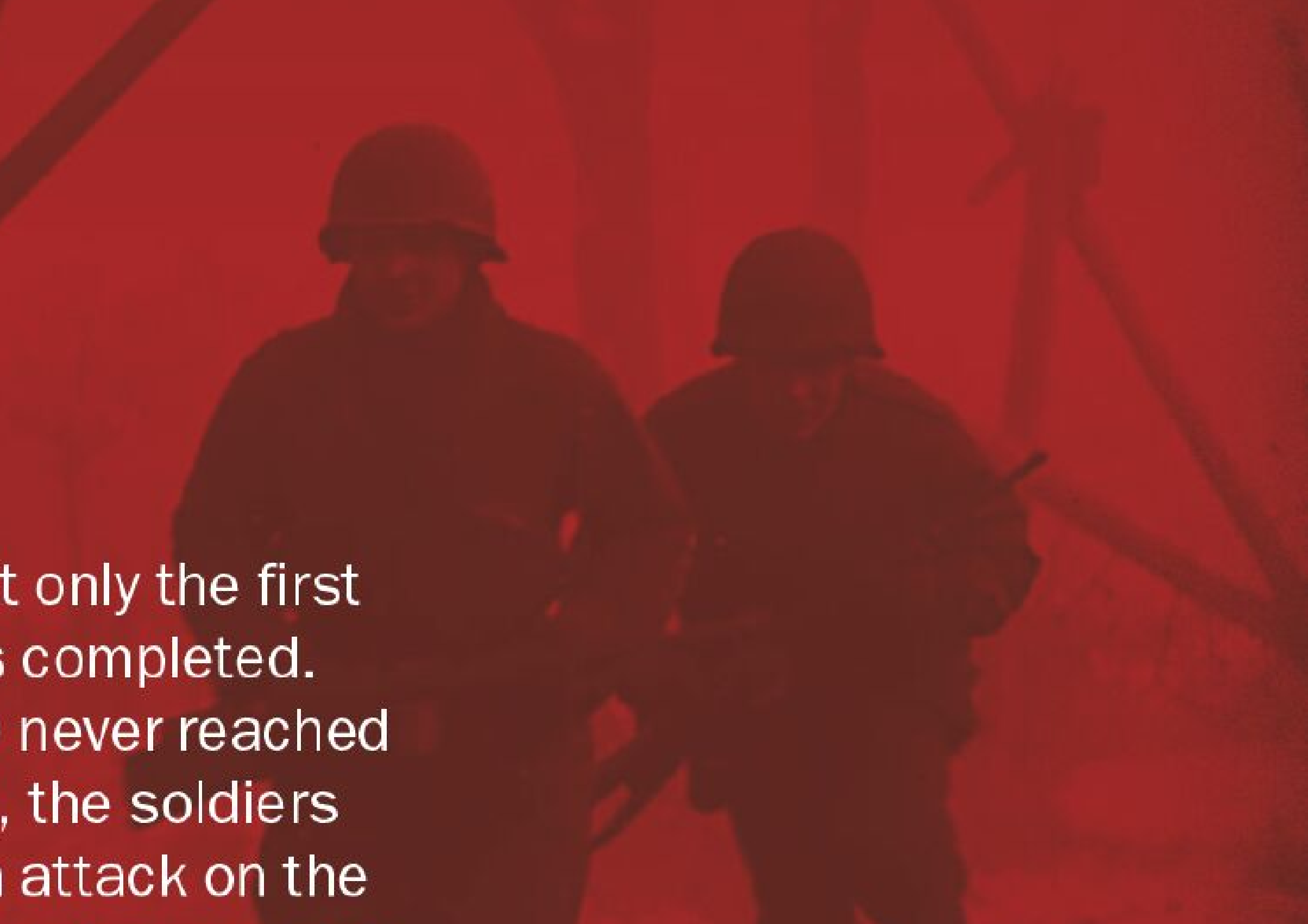
German to Yankee

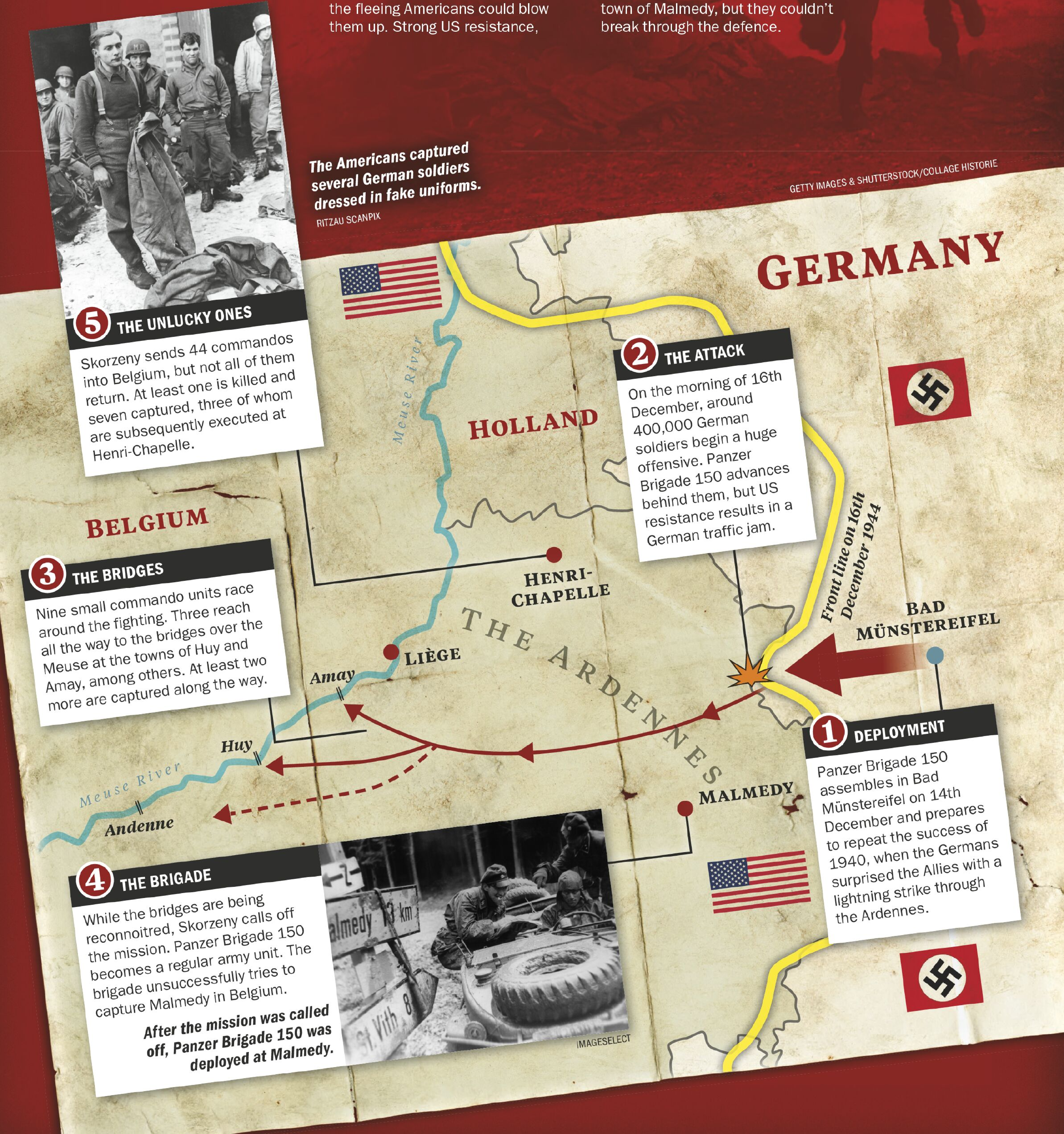
Skorzeny did nothing by half: Panzer Brigade 150 was supposed to look like Americans, walk like Americans, and chew gum like Americans. Some details, however, were needed to make them recognisable to other Germans. There was far from enough equipment for all the soldiers in the brigade, so only the special Stielau unit was disguised as US soldiers in every detail.

Mission was a failure and a success

The goal of capturing at least three of the main bridges over the river Meuse failed, but the commandos still proved their worth.

On paper, Hitler's plan was simple: first, small highly mobile commando units were to reconnoitre the bridges over the Meuse and create chaos among Americans by cutting telephone cables and removing road signs. Shortly after, three armoured groups from Panzer Brigade 150 were to capture the bridges before the fleeing Americans could blow them up. Strong US resistance, however, meant that only the first part of the plan was completed. Panzer Brigade 150 never reached the Meuse. Instead, the soldiers were deployed in an attack on the town of Malmedy, but they couldn't break through the defence.





GETTY IMAGES & SHUTTERSTOCK/COLLAGE HISTORIE

The Americans captured several German soldiers dressed in fake uniforms.

RITZAU SCANPIX

1 DEPLOYMENT

Panzer Brigade 150 assembles in Bad Münstereifel on 14th December and prepares to repeat the success of 1940, when the Germans surprised the Allies with a lightning strike through the Ardennes.

2 THE ATTACK

On the morning of 16th December, around 400,000 German soldiers begin a huge offensive. Panzer Brigade 150 advances behind them, but US resistance results in a German traffic jam.

3 THE BRIDGES

Nine small commando units race around the fighting. Three reach all the way to the bridges over the Meuse at the towns of Huy and Amay, among others. At least two more are captured along the way.

4 THE BRIGADE

While the bridges are being reconnoitred, Skorzeny calls off the mission. Panzer Brigade 150 becomes a regular army unit. The brigade unsuccessfully tries to capture Malmedy in Belgium.

After the mission was called off, Panzer Brigade 150 was deployed at Malmedy.

IMAGESELECT

5 THE UNLUCKY ONES

Skorzeny sends 44 commandos into Belgium, but not all of them return. At least one is killed and seven captured, three of whom are subsequently executed at Henri-Chapelle.

General Eisenhower – the commander-in-chief of the Allied forces – heard that assassins were on their way to the Versailles headquarters. "The report was astonishing," Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs.

"For several months I had been driving everywhere around France with no more protection than that provided by an orderly and an aide who habitually rode in the car with me. The story was brought to me on 20th December by a very agitated American colonel who was certain that he had complete and positive proof of the existence of such a plot."

Eisenhower's secretary, Kay Summersby, described how everyone thought Skorzeny himself was on his way. HQ was promptly surrounded by tanks and the number of soldiers quadrupled. No one could get in or out without saying the day's password.

"The pass system became a strict matter of life or death," Summersby later wrote.

But Eisenhower wasn't convinced by the intelligence: "I discounted the murder theory but agreed to move my quarters closer to headquarters."

While Eisenhower hid at HQ, the general's service car drove on schedule between Paris and Versailles. In the back seat sat his double, Colonel Baldwin Smith, who resembled Eisenhower to a T.

Photos of Otto Skorzeny with the words "Saboteur" and "Assassin" were distributed throughout France. Before long, the Allied High Command began receiving a large number of reports of false sightings. The Austrian commando was apparently seen everywhere: from a grocery shop in the town of Saint-Étienne 500 km south of Paris to a smoky bar in the middle of the Champs-Élysées.

Rumours of thousands of Germans in American uniforms resulted in collective paranoia along the front. The queues at American checkpoints got longer and longer, as everyone was grilled on popular American topics. When US General Bruce Clark couldn't answer a question about baseball, he was promptly arrested and detained.

General Omar Bradley wrote: "A half-million GIs played cat and mouse with each other every time they met on the road. Neither rank nor credentials spared the traveller an inquisition at each intersection he passed."

Bradley himself was detained when he answered a question incorrectly. An officer later told Bradley to travel by plane as "English-speaking Germans in captured America ODs [olive drab uniforms] had infiltrated our lines".

> *"Neither rank nor credentials spared the traveller an inquisition at each intersection"*
>
> GENERAL OMAR BRADLEY

The paranoia had fatal consequences for four US soldiers. Two were shot in Bellevue, Belgium, on 20th December, when a patrol thought they were Germans in US uniforms. In Wardin, the 6th Armoured Division began firing on soldiers from the 35th Infantry Division because they thought they were Germans in disguise; two died.

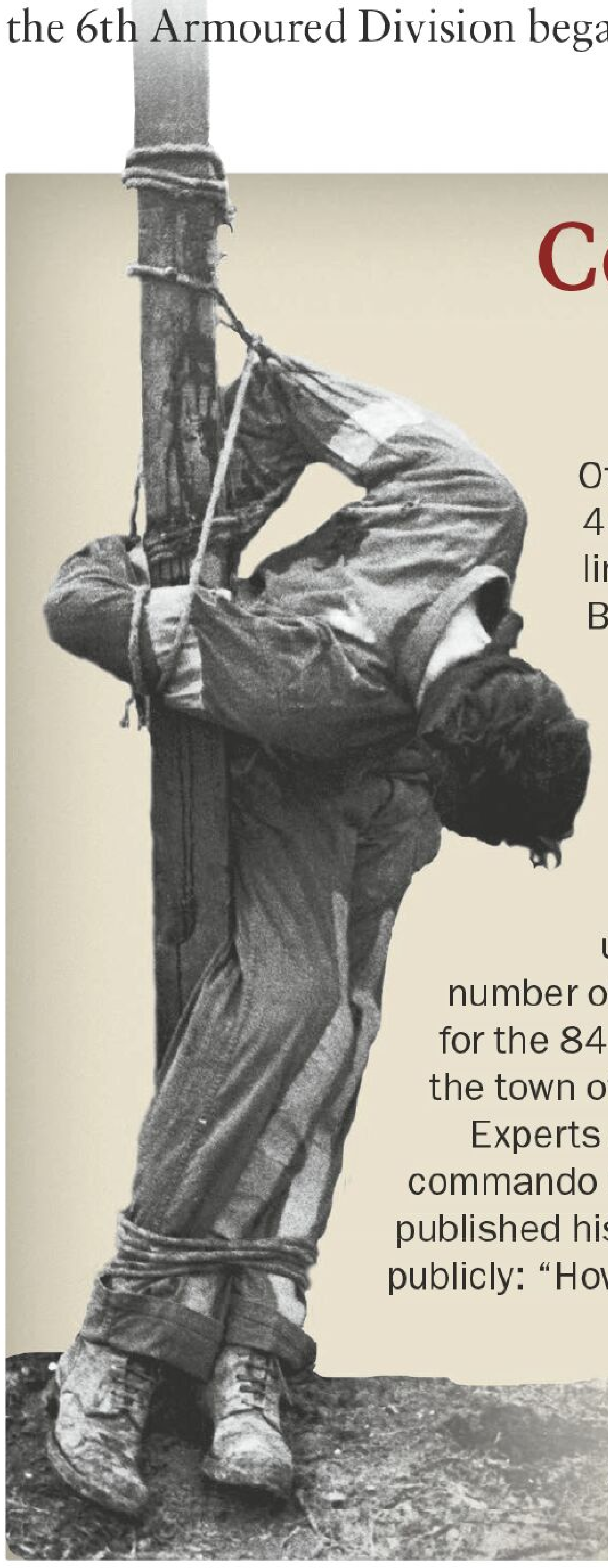
Praise from Hitler

Skorzeny's commandos achieved more than anyone other than Hitler had dreamed of: two important bridges over the Meuse river were reconnoitred, and intelligence about access roads and enemy movements was sent to HQ.

However, the information was useless: the most successful armoured units reached just over 100 km into enemy territory before being stopped on 26th December, just 6 km from the river. Allied planes then drove the Germans back. The Führer's failed Ardennes offensive ended up costing the Germans over 100,000 soldiers.

On 31st December, Skorzeny went to Hitler's HQ. He regretted that the operation had not gone better, but the Führer swept his remorse aside: "I have no complaints with you, Skorzeny. You had to improvise everything, with limited means, and your panzer brigade couldn't play its role in cooperation with 6th Army. Where your commando unit is concerned, I have the impression that its psychological effect was much greater than you might think." ■

Commandos paid the ultimate price



Otto Skorzeny claimed that only eight of the total of 44 commandos who managed to get behind American lines during the Ardennes offensive were captured. But Heinz Rohde, who was one of the 44 soldiers, reported that when the commando units met after the mission, about two-thirds were missing.

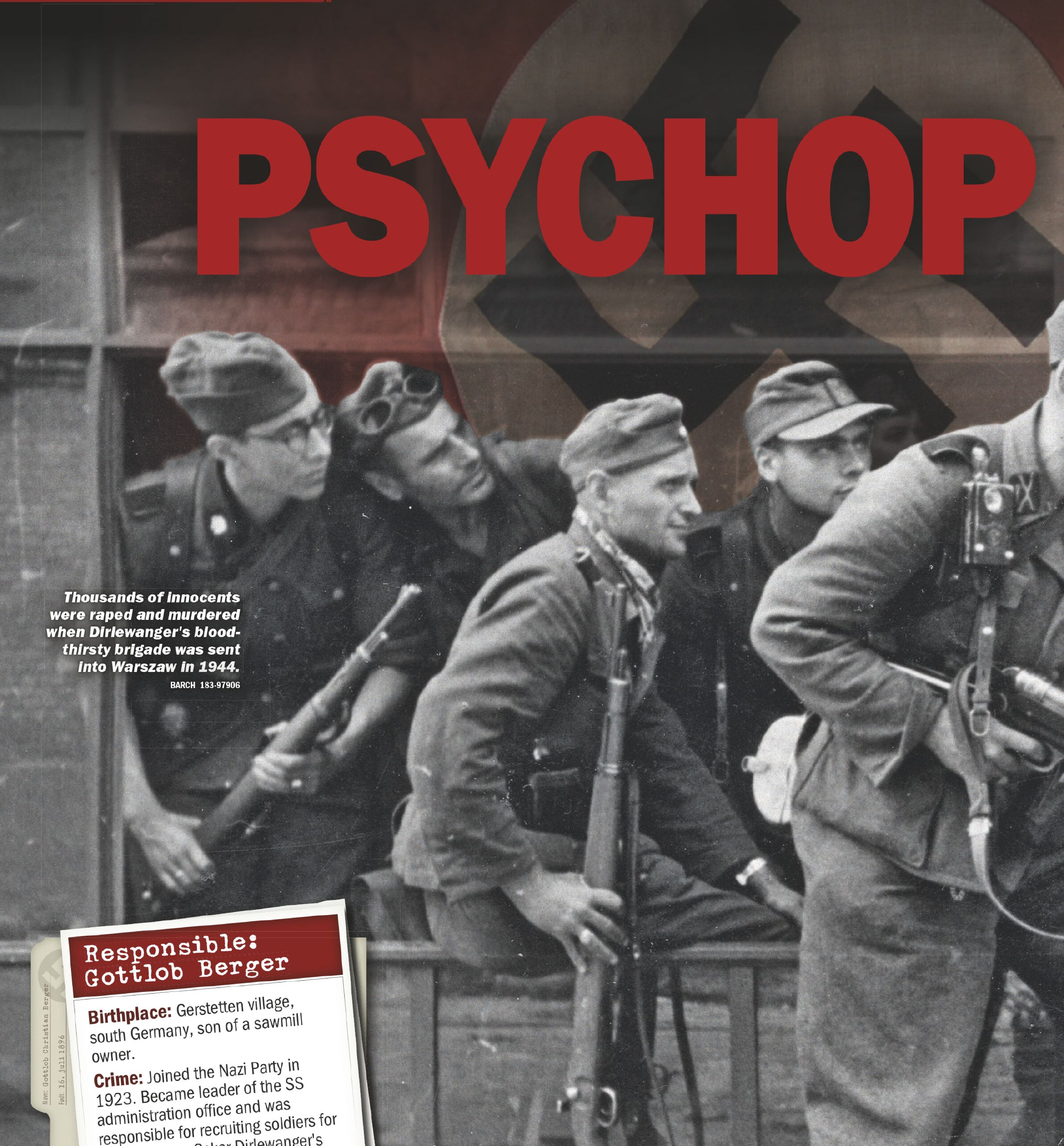
The Americans claimed that they'd captured a lot of disguised commandos. The explanation, however, was that many of the regular German troops had been wearing stolen bits of American uniform during the fighting to keep warm. A large number of them were shot by US troops who wanted revenge for the 84 American prisoners of war killed by SS soldiers near the town of Malmedy.

Experts estimate that at least 15 soldiers from Skorzeny's commando units were executed. When Skorzeny triumphantly published his book on Operation Greif in 1950, Rohde raged publicly: "How lightly you sent us out to almost certain death!"

The Americans executed the three German commandos who had been captured wearing fake uniforms near the city of Aywaille on 17th December.

GETTY IMAGES

PSYCHOP



Thousands of innocents were raped and murdered when Dirlewanger's bloodthirsty brigade was sent into Warszaw in 1944.

BARCH 183-97906

Responsible: Gottlob Berger

Navn: Gottlob Christian Berger

Født: 16. Juli 1896

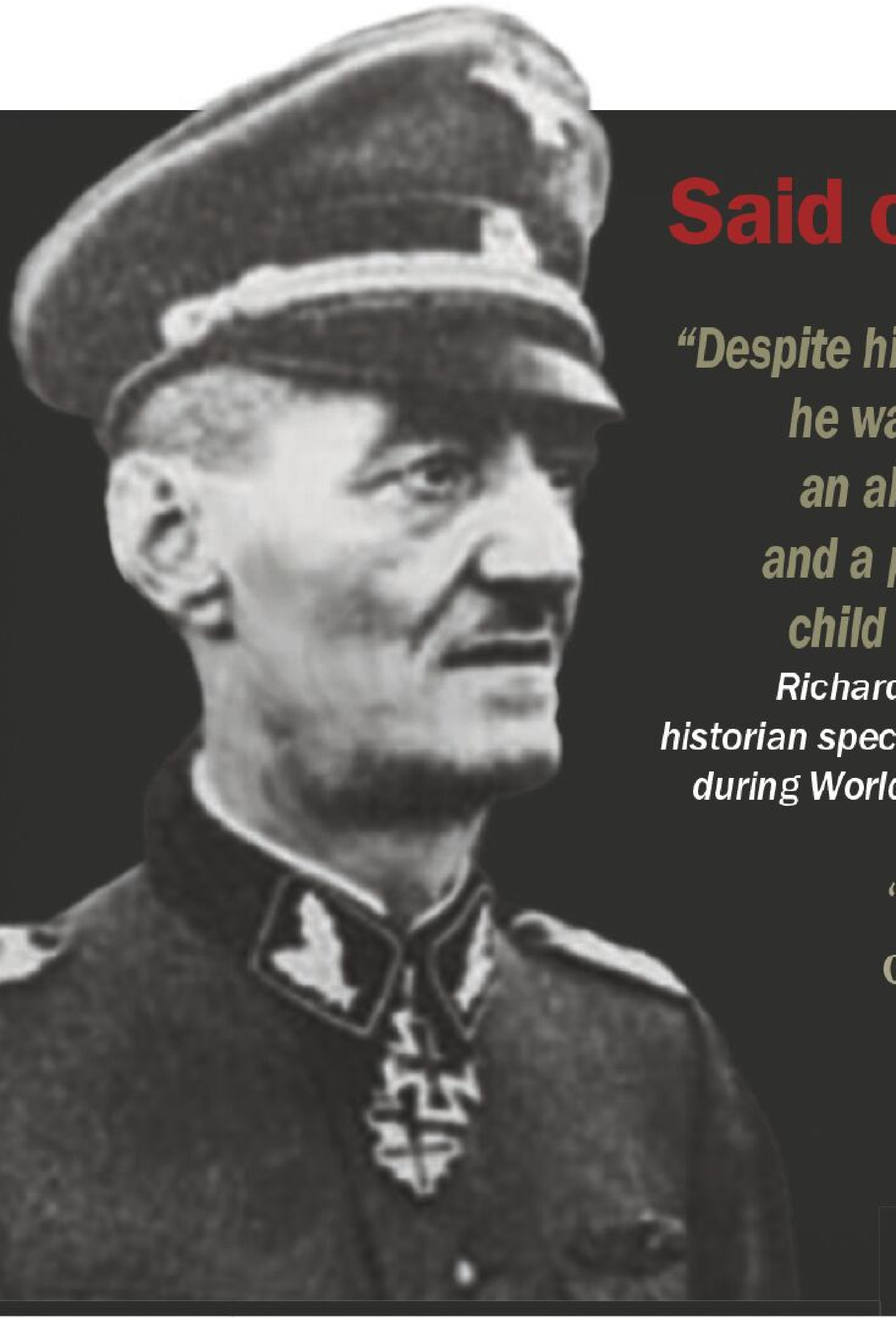
Birthplace: Gerstetten village, south Germany, son of a sawmill owner.

Crime: Joined the Nazi Party in 1923. Became leader of the SS administration office and was responsible for recruiting soldiers for Oskar Dirlewanger's brigade of criminals.

Fate: Berger got 25 years in prison, but was released in 1951. Died as a convinced Nazi in 1975.

ATHS IN UNIFORM

Murderers, rapists and psychopaths went to war when the leader of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, created a special unit of hardened criminals. Led by a sadistic sex offender, this bloodthirsty brigade was unleashed in conquered lands behind the Eastern Front.



Said of Oskar Dirlewanger...

“Despite his intelligence he was a liar, an alcoholic and a perverted child abuser”
Richard C. Lukas, historian specialising in Poland during World War II.enskrig

“A violent sadist”
Richard Rhodes, American journalist, historian, and winner of the Pulitzer prize

“A mentally unstable, violent fanatic and alcoholic who has the habit of using violence under the influence of drugs”
Police report, describing Dirlewanger at the end of World War I

“Of all World War II's battlefields, only a few outperformed Oskar Dirlewanger in cruelty”
Timothy D. Snyder, historian specialising in the holocaust and Eastern Europe

“An expert in extermination and a supporter of sadism and necrophilia”
J. Bowyer Bell, American historian and political adviser

“The most evil man in the SS”
Chris Bishop, military historian

“A psychopathic murderer and child abuser”
Steven Zaloga, American military historian

AF ESBEN SYLVEST

Even the war’s most experienced German soldiers stopped and wondered. The newly arrived SS unit that was to assist against the Polish partisans did not look like anything the Germans had seen before. “Dirlewanger’s Brigade” seemed restless, wore no insignias. And stank of booze.

Without fear the new SS soldiers roared bestially and advanced despite fierce shelling. Dozens of them fell to the ground, but the losses did not weaken the brigade.

With their drunken death-defiance Dirlewanger’s Brigade fit perfectly into the surrounding chaos. The 1944 uprising in Warsaw had just broken out, and Polish resistance fighters fought from house to house to crush the hated German occupiers. The uprising started a bloody frenzy of fights in the sewers and knife duels in the city's dark cellars.

Among the soldiers in Warsaw was 18 year-old engineering soldier, Matthias Schenk, who was one of the German minority in Belgium. His army unit was to capture a street in central Warsaw, but they were not successful. The Polish resistance was fierce and seemed invincible – until Dirlewanger’s Brigade appeared in the streets and launched their attack.

When the brigade's first tank was hit, the unit grabbed civilians from their homes and ordered them up onto the other tanks as human shields. A little girl fell from her mother’s arms and was crushed under the tanks’ tracks. An SS soldier shot her hysterical mother through the head to quieten her. Any civilians trying to flee were shot.

> “Why not look for suitable candidates from among the scoundrels?”
>
> *Heinrich Himmler challenged Dirlewanger to find soldiers from among hardened criminals.*

Matthias Schenk has since told how he saw a tall, lanky man in a black leather coat standing in the background, furiously ordering his SS unit forward again and again. The man had a thin moustache and a lean, scarred face that looked like a skull.

Amid exchanges of fire and explosions, Schenk heard the man in the leather coat command his men to beat all Poles to death. Including women and children.

Long after, Schenk discovered that the man with the skull-like face was Oskar Dirlewanger, a notorious sadist who headed the SS Dirlewanger Brigade – a murderous mob of violent convicts and unfit soldiers who had been kicked out of all other SS units.

Hitler wanted habitual offenders

Dirlewanger’s Brigade was Heinrich Himmler's most insane idea. When he conceived of it, in spring 1940, Himmler was unaware of the destructive force he was unleashing.

His original idea was to gather convicted poachers from the German prison into a military unit, where they could do more good than in their cells.

In the beginning, the recruitment was careful. Adolf Hitler authorised the poachers being given an amnesty, but on the condition that the SS unit only enlisted poachers convicted of illegal hunting with firearms – not with traps and snares. Moreover, Hitler wanted only prisoners who were convicted repeat offenders. The unit was not to be manned with half-hearted amateurs, but

MASSACRES: SS soldiers went door-to-door executing residents

Residents of the Greek village, Distomo (near Delfi), were suspected of helping partisans.

On 10 June, 1944, SS soldiers entered and interrogated the mayor without result. Thereafter, the Germans went door-to-door executing the village's male residents and 38 children. The women were raped and impaled on bayonettes, many had their breasts cut off. The soldiers then set fire to the village. The whole massacre took a few hours.

218 dead

with men who had demonstrated a willingness to kill, said the Führer.

In June 1940, the SS selected 84 poachers. Two months later the brigade totalled 300 men, who were gathered in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, north of Berlin. Here they underwent brief training and met their new commander, Oskar Dirlewanger.

Dream come true

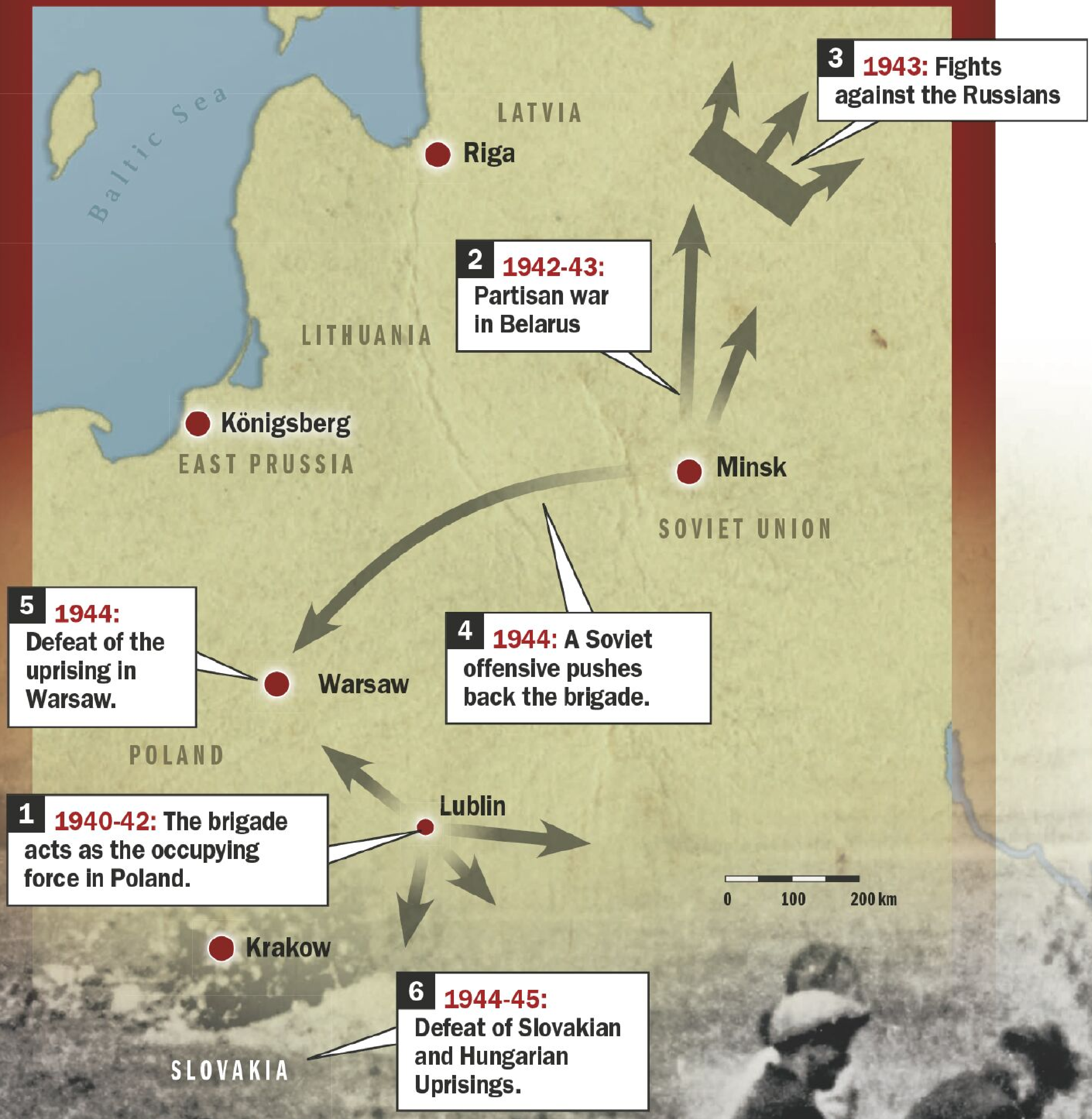
The 44 year-old SS leader had a chequered past. He was a doctor of political science and had been highly decorated during World War I, during which he was wounded several times in combat on the Western Front. But he also drank uninhibitedly and in the 1930s had spent two years in jail for the rape of a 13 year-old girl and the attempted rape of several other minors.

He joined Hitler's newly formed Nazi Party in 1922 and 10 years later was employed by the SA, the Nazi Stormtroopers. When he was convicted of rape in 1934, he was, however, expelled from the Party on the grounds of immoral and unacceptable behaviour.

After prison, he travelled to Spain and fought in the German Condor Legion on Franco's side in the Spanish Civil War, but his dream was to serve Germany again. In vain he wrote to Himmler pleading to join the SS corps. With the creation of the new SS unit Dirlewanger's dream came true – thanks to his old friend, Gottlob Berger. Dirlewanger and Berger knew each other from the paramilitary, right-wing corps that originated in Germany just after World War I. Since then Gottlob ▶

Five bloody years behind the front

Battles against the Russian partisans were brutal and demanded death-defying men, who willingly moved outside the rules. Dirlewanger's Brigade was created to fight behind the front.



3 **1943:** Fights against the Russians

2 **1942-43:** Partisan war in Belarus

5 **1944:** Defeat of the uprising in Warsaw.

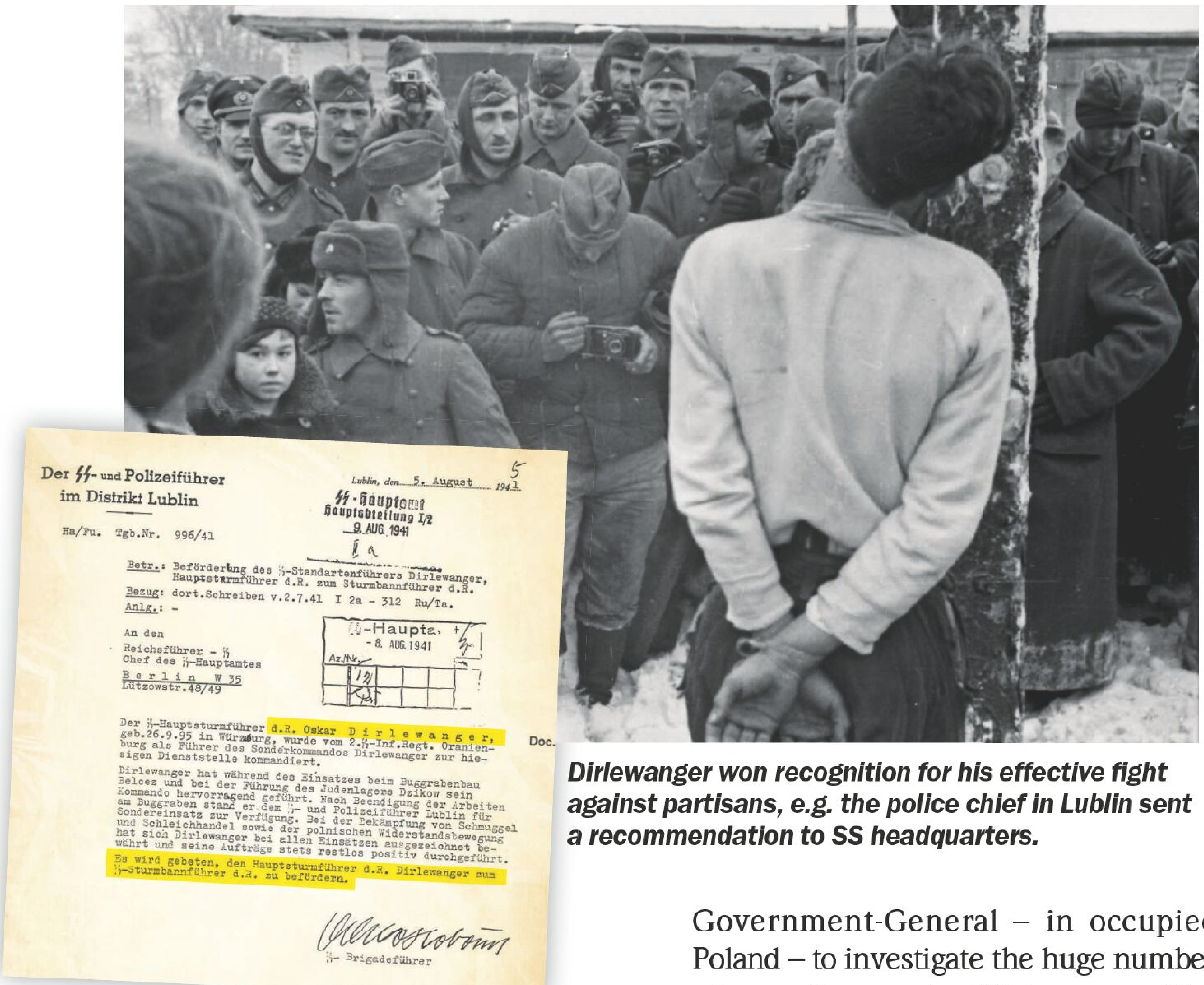
4 **1944:** A Soviet offensive pushes back the brigade.

1 **1940-42:** The brigade acts as the occupying force in Poland.

6 **1944-45:** Defeat of Slovakian and Hungarian Uprisings.

Dirlewanger had free rein in the the fight against the Russian partisans – terror against civilians and arbitrary executions were some of his methods.

SCANPIX



BUNDESARCHIV

Der ϟϟ- und Polizeiführer
im Distrikt Lublin

Ha/Fu. Tgb.Nr. 996/41

Lublin, den 5. August 1941.

5

ϟϟ-Hauptamt
Hauptabteilung I/2
9. AUG. 1941

I a

Betr.: Beförderung des ϟϟ-Standartenführers Dirlewanger, Hauptsturmführer d.R. zum Sturmbannführer d.R.

Bezug: dort.Schreiben v.2.7.41 I 2a - 312 Ru/Ta.

Anlg.: -

An den
Reichsführer - ϟϟ
Chef des ϟϟ-Hauptamtes
Berlin W 35
Lützowstr.48/49

ϟϟ-Hauptа.
- 8. AUG. 1941
Az./Nr.
1/2

Der ϟϟ-Hauptsturmführer d.R. Oskar Dirlewanger, geb.26.9.95 in Würzburg, wurde vom 2.ϟϟ-Inf.Regt. Oranienburg als Führer des Sonderkommandos Dirlewanger zur hiesigen Dienststelle kommandiert.

Dirlewanger hat während des Einsatzes beim Buggrabenbau Belcez und bei der Führung des Judenlagers Dzikow sein Kommando hervorragend geführt. Nach Beendigung der Arbeiten am Buggraben stand er dem ϟϟ- und Polizeiführer Lublin für Sondereinsatz zur Verfügung. Bei der Bekämpfung von Schmuggel und Schleichhandel sowie der polnischen Widerstandsbewegung hat sich Dirlewanger bei allen Einsätzen ausgezeichnet bewährt und seine Aufträge stets restlos positiv durchgeführt.

Es wird gebeten, den Hauptsturmführer d.R. Dirlewanger zum ϟϟ-Sturmbannführer d.R. zu befördern.

ϟϟ- Brigadeführer

Doc.

Dirlewanger won recognition for his effective fight against partisans, e.g. the police chief in Lublin sent a recommendation to SS headquarters.

Berger had become a general in the SS and now he appointed his old friend commander of the poachers.

The SS kill women with poison

After training in Sachsenhausen, the brigade was sent to Poland – first to the border area with the Soviet Union, where the soldiers built fortifications and guarded a Jewish labour camp, and then to the cities of Krakow and Lublin. In Lublin's Jewish ghetto, Dirlewanger and his poachers became notorious for killing, extorting and looting civilians.

Dirlewanger arrested Jews on the charge of committing ritual murder, and unless they paid up a large sum, they were shot on the spot.

"Dirlewanger is a plague and a source of horror for the entire population. He has repeatedly plundered the ghetto in Lublin and demanded bribes," stated the jurist, Georg Konrad Morgen, who had been sent by the SS to the Government-General – in occupied Poland – to investigate the huge number of accusations against Dirlewanger. The list of crimes turned out to be far more extensive than the jurist had dreamed. For example, Morgen discovered that Dirlewanger had carried out "scientific experiments" on young Jewish women, forcing them to undress before they were given a strychnine injection.

"Then Dirlewanger and his friends watched, smoking cigarettes, as the women died. The women's bodies were then cut into pieces, mixed with horse meat and boiled for soup," said Morgen after the war.

> "Dirlewanger is a plague and a source of horror for the entire population"
>
> *Georg Konrad Morgen, who investigated Dirlewanger's crimes in Lublin.*

Becoming aware of the full extent of Dirlewanger's behaviour, the SS decided to get rid of the poachers. Friedrich Krüger, senior SS and police chief in Poland, called the SS General Gottlob Berger at headquarters in Berlin with an ultimatum: "This group of criminals disappears from the Government-General within one week, or I will personally lock them all up!"

However, if Krüger's intention was to stop Dirlewanger, he had called the wrong person. Berger did nothing to dampen his old friend's excesses – he just sent him further east to the endless Belarusian forests to hunt Russian partisans. Here Dirlewanger was beyond the reach of SS investigators.

In their new hunting grounds Dirlewanger and his poachers exploited their brutal skills, killing at will; a pack of hungry wolves in a flock of sheep.

Dirlewanger gets free rein

For two years Dirlewanger's Brigade ravaged the area behind the front in Belarus. The unit were among those deployed against partisans who had destroyed the German supply lines. And Dirlewanger had his own, unorthodox methods for sniffing out partisans.

He flew in an observation plane over villages suspected of harbouring partisans, and if he was fired upon from the area around a village, he would return with his soldiers and burn the village down. During operations they took no prisoners but killed everyone – men, women and children.

At other times, Dirlewanger gathered women and children, left behind by the partisans, and forced them to walk through the minefields that protected the partisan positions.

Dirlewanger did not distinguish between civilians and fighters, and wherever his men went killings, rapes and looting followed.

The Nazi leadership in Germany did nothing to stop or slow the barbarism, which some historians say cost at least 120,000 Belarusians their lives. On the contrary, in January 1943 Hitler issued a decree that German soldiers could not be prosecuted for offenses

MASSACRES: Rebellious peasants killed by SS soldiers

On September 29, 1944, SS Major Walter Reder led his soldiers into the Italian village of Marzabotto near Bologna. The small town had gained a reputation for supporting resistance fighters, and would now receive its punishment. In the days that followed, the inhabitants – a large number of whom were women, the elderly and children – were systematically executed. 110 of the victims were under 10 years of age. Today, the massacre of Marzabotto is known for being the worst SS massacre of civilians in Western Europe.

ca 770 dead

committed during anti-partisan operations. Officially, Dirlewanger had free rein.

Civilians burned alive

During one of the operations Dirlewanger's men encircled a large village and ordered all the 2,500 inhabitants – men, women and children – into some large barns. Dirlewanger then stepped forward and issued their death warrant, "Shoot them all!" The door to the first barn was opened and the soldiers emptied their machine gun magazines into the crowd. Then they inserted new magazines and started shooting again. The soldiers then closed the door and set fire to the barn.

The villagers who got out – several of them engulfed in flames – were mown down. The same fate met the prisoners in the other barns.

But even in the most lawless partisan war Dirlewanger's behaviour aroused dismay – despite Hitler's blessing. For example, in May 1943, when Dirlewanger's Brigade, along with other SS units, took part in a large-scale operation targeting partisans. Around 9,800 partisans lost their lives and 6,000 were taken prisoner.

Again Dirlewanger's men were at the forefront of brutality, and when a German propaganda officer travelled around the area after the fighting, he reported that some partisans had been burned alive, while others had been eaten by stray pigs. This repeated and unnecessary bloodlust caused some, such as Wilhelm Kube, Commissioner-General of Belarus, to protest to Himmler about Dirlewanger's brutality. But his guardian angel Gottlob Berger stepped in again. He wrote off the criticism as nonsense and stated that Dirlewanger was quite decent – considering the circumstances.

In June 1943, Dirlewanger commanded 760 men, but his unit constantly needed fresh blood. Casualties were considerable, far higher than in other SS units – not without reason was the unit's motto "Himmelfartskommandoen" ("the suicide mission").

Gradually, the number of suitable poachers became limited and the ▶

Dirlewanger led a Polish bloodbath

Thousands of innocent civilians were slaughtered when Dirlewanger's unruly brigade was let loose on the streets of Warsaw. In two days 40,000 Polish people lost their lives.

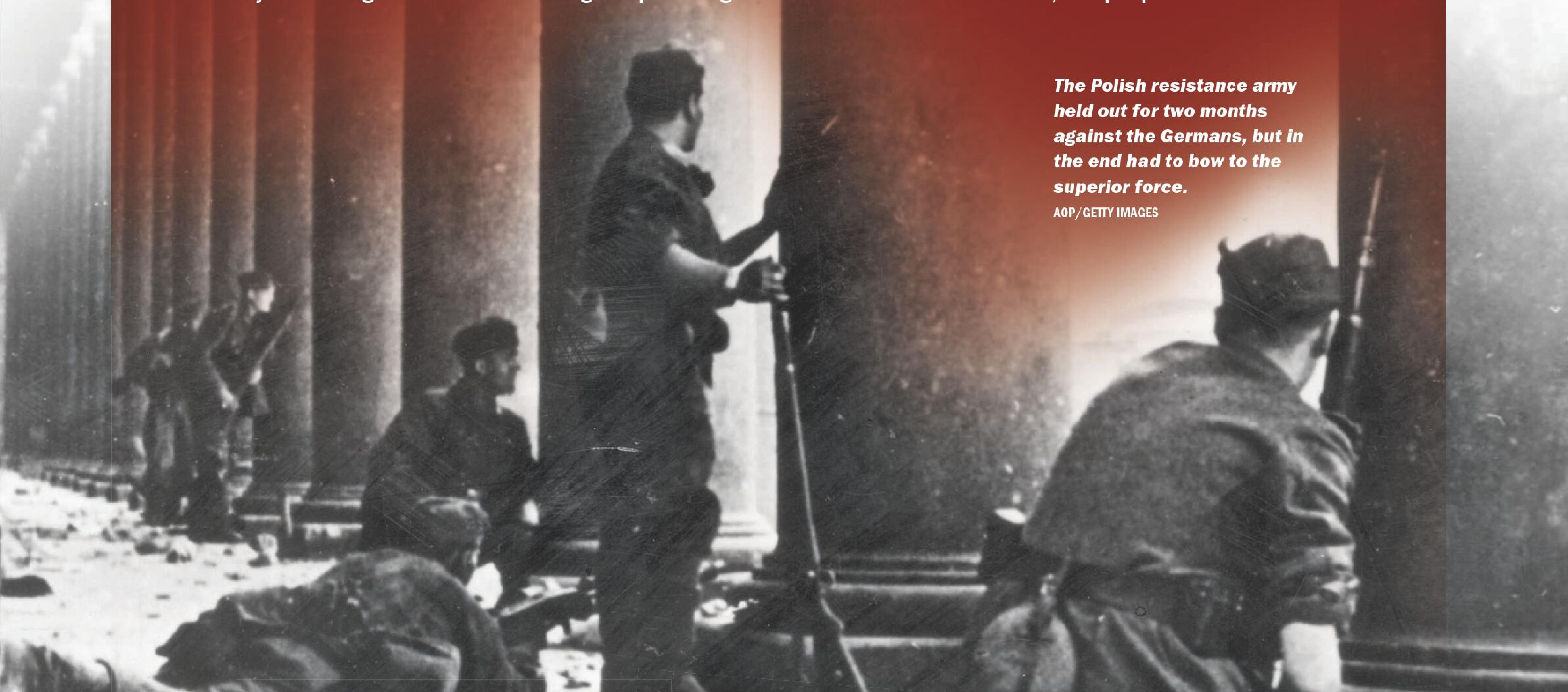
During the uprising in Warsaw in 1944, Oskar Dirlewanger's bloodthirsty brigade were at the front of the so-called Wola massacre – the worst massacre in the history of Poland.

In the first days of August, Dirlewanger's men rolled through the district of Wola in Warsaw, all the while deliberately murdering random civilians. In one incident 5,000 Poles were herded together and then tortured, mutilated and shot. In the first two days alone Dirlewanger's Brigade committed 40,000 murders.

The Germans' strategy was to expose the civilian population to so much terror that the Polish resistance army would give up their fight. The intention was for German soldiers to be thereby spared gruelling street fighting.

The result was just the opposite. The Polish partisans fought fiercely, and the uprising lasted 63 days before the Poles finally had to surrender.

The total death toll is unknown, but historians estimate that as many as 200,000 people lost their lives.



The Polish resistance army held out for two months against the Germans, but in the end had to bow to the superior force.

AOP/GETTY IMAGES

Every year Polish veterans of the uprising meet to commemorate their fallen comrades.

SCALA/BUNDESARCHIV

MASSACRES: Germans burned French civilians to death

On the morning of June 10, 1944, the SS received reports that an SS officer was being held captive by French resistance fighters in a nearby village. Within hours a German battalion had surrounded the village of Oradour-sur-Glane and gathered all the residents. The men were forced into six barns where they were first shot and then set on fire. Women and children were gathered in the village church, where a fire bomb was ignited. Those who escaped were shot by the soldiers.

ca 642 dead

recruitment base expanded. Dirlewanger now received soldiers who had violated the rules in other units, as well as Russian renegades and a wide range of convicted criminals.

In February 1944, for example, Himmler allowed Dirlewanger to handpick up to 800 men among the "anti-social and professional criminals" interned in German concentration camps. Now the brigade's recruits included murderers, rapists, child abusers and the mentally ill. With a certain pride in his voice, Heinrich Himmler mentioned Dirlewanger and his brigade in a speech to local Nazi leaders in Poland, in 1944: "I asked Dirlewanger: why not look for suitable candidates among the scoundrels, the real criminals?" Himmler also highlighted another feature of Dirlewanger's Brigade for the Assembly – its callous discipline: "The atmosphere in the regiment is almost medieval in its use of physical punishment. If a man grimaces at the question of whether we will win the war, he will fall down. Dead, because the others have shot him."

Rule-breakers in Dirlewanger's Brigade were usually punished by being beaten with clubs or, at worst, shot. A particularly feared punishment was the so-called Dirlewanger-chest. Here the victim was forced to stand upright in a cramped, closed box for days. According to the soldiers, the victim came out either as a dead man or a murderer.

These harsh penalties were intended to force blind obedience, unreserved courage and fearlessness from the soldiers. In December 1943, Dirlewanger even issued an order that cowardice in battle would be punishable by death.

Vodka before breakfast

During the uprising in Warsaw in

Bronislav Kaminski

Originally Bronislav Kaminskij was a soldier in The Red Army, but he defected to Germany.

BARCH 101-280-1075-16A

SS leaders shocked by Kaminski's killers

Soldiers in the Kaminski Brigade looted, raped and murdered during the fighting in Warsaw.

Dirlewanger's men were not the only SS soldiers notorious for their bloodlust during the fierce fighting on the Eastern Front. Equally feared was the Kaminski Brigade, which consisted of deserters from The Red Army.

The unit was led by the brutal Bronislav Kaminski – a former Soviet officer who in the 1930s was at odds with the Communists and was sent to a Siberian prison camp.

The Kaminski Brigade was especially notorious for its action against Russian partisans and anti-Nazi resistance groups.

In 1944, this hardened brigade was sent to Warsaw to help put down the uprising. Here the brigade plundered, raped and murdered civilians to such a severe extent that SS leadership chose to pull the unit out of the fighting. Its many brutal years on the Eastern Front had transformed the brigade into a group of drunken criminals who could no longer be controlled.

Looting was a particular problem for the SS leaders. When Kaminski and his soldiers kept the spoils of war for themselves, it was regarded as theft of property from the Third Reich – a serious offence. When Kaminski's men raped two German girls the SS found a definitive solution to the problem: the brigade was dissolved, and Bronislav Kaminski was secretly executed by firing squad outside Warsaw.

1944, Matthias Schenk witnessed first-hand this death-defiance when Dirlewanger's alcohol-affected soldiers uttered their collective roar. They had just been ordered to withdraw from Belarus, which had been conquered by The Red Army. The unit was then upgraded to "SS Regiment Dirlewanger" but the soldiers' attitude was the same: concentrated savagery and bloodlust.

During the Warsaw uprising's first week Germans killed 40,000-50,000 Poles – mostly in the district of Wola, where Dirlewanger's men were deployed. Without regard to the victims, they murdered and raped their way through Warsaw's old town, where the unit set fire to prisoners, impaled babies on bayonets and hanged women from balconies, according to eyewitnesses.

After a few days of combat, Schenk himself came under Dirlewanger's command. Here he learned to drink vodka on an empty stomach every morning, with the rest of the soldiers, so he was well-sedated before entering combat.

He was sent to the front line to blow up doors and remove obstacles so Dirlewanger's men could move in. One day the soldiers penetrated a room where wounded Poles and Germans lay side-by-side, being cared for by a doctor and 15 nurses from the Polish Red Cross. The wounded Germans begged them not to kill the Poles, but Dirlewanger ignored all pleas and smashed the Poles' heads with rifle butts. Then, they tore the clothes off the terrified nurses.

> "You cannot call Dirlewanger a good boy, but he was a good soldier"
>
> SS General Gottlob Berger, who had watched over Dirlewanger.

That evening Matthias Schenk witnessed the naked and battered nurses with their hands over their heads and blood running down their legs being led to a gallows erected in an open space. Dirlewanger watched, laughing, and kicked the stool out from under every one of the terrified nurses.

After two months, the Germans crushed the Warsaw uprising. Up to 200,000 Poles lost their lives and SS Regiment Dirlewanger lost 2,700 men, most of whom were from an SS penal camp and new to the unit.

Schenk had had enough. In winter 1944-45 he ran away from his unit, and Polish peasants helped by hiding him in a horse stable until the war was over. He never found out why they did it: "From pity I presume. I looked like a battered child."

Dirlewanger escapes the Russians

After Warsaw, Dirlewanger's troops continued on to Slovakia to defeat another uprising, and in spring 1945, the unit was transferred to Germany, where the last battle against the advancing Russians was to take place.

Dirlewanger escaped Russian revenge, but failed to save his own life. In early June 1945, he was captured in southern Germany. How he got there is unknown. He came into French custody, but the guards were Poles.

How much they knew about Oskar Dirlewanger's crimes is uncertain, but, according to a fellow inmate, the Poles beat Dirlewanger so thoroughly that on the morning of June 5, 1945, he could neither speak nor move. Dirlewanger was officially declared dead two days later.

His old friend and guardian angel, Gottlob Berger, could no longer watch over him. Berger himself had been captured in southern Germany and was awaiting his war crimes trial in Nuremberg. During the trial he was confronted with his old friend's atrocities: "You cannot call Dirlewanger a good boy, but he was a good soldier," said Berger, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison for crimes against humanity – and pardoned in 1951.

The soldier Matthias Schenk returned to Belgium, where he started a family and had four children. Over the years, he established a small factory.

He would never forget his experiences in Poland. He organised aid relief for the country and met Polish veterans of the uprising in Warsaw, saying in an interview: "They were friendly. One of them told me that he had shot at the German troop train that had arrived on August 1." The very train Matthias Schenk himself had arrived on. ■

FRENCH L. MACLEAN

Rumours said that a young man lay in Dirlewanger's grave.

Dirlewanger's body was exhumed

Soon after the World War II, rumours of the psychopathic mass murderer Dirlewanger began circulating. He had reportedly survived the war and had fled to Egypt. According to rumours, his grave in Altshausen, Lake Constance, contained a different body.

In 1960, German authorities opened the tomb to investigate the claim. Professor Günther Weyrich from the Institute of Forensic Medicine at Freiburg University identified the corpse in the coffin as Oskar Dirlewanger – based on the skeleton's height and the war injuries it had sustained.

But the speculation did not end there. Israeli historian Michael Bar-Zohar, argues that after the war Dirlewanger joined the French Foreign Legion. And the American writer Glenn B. Infield believes that after the war Dirlewanger fled to Egypt, where he helped to train the Egyptian army.

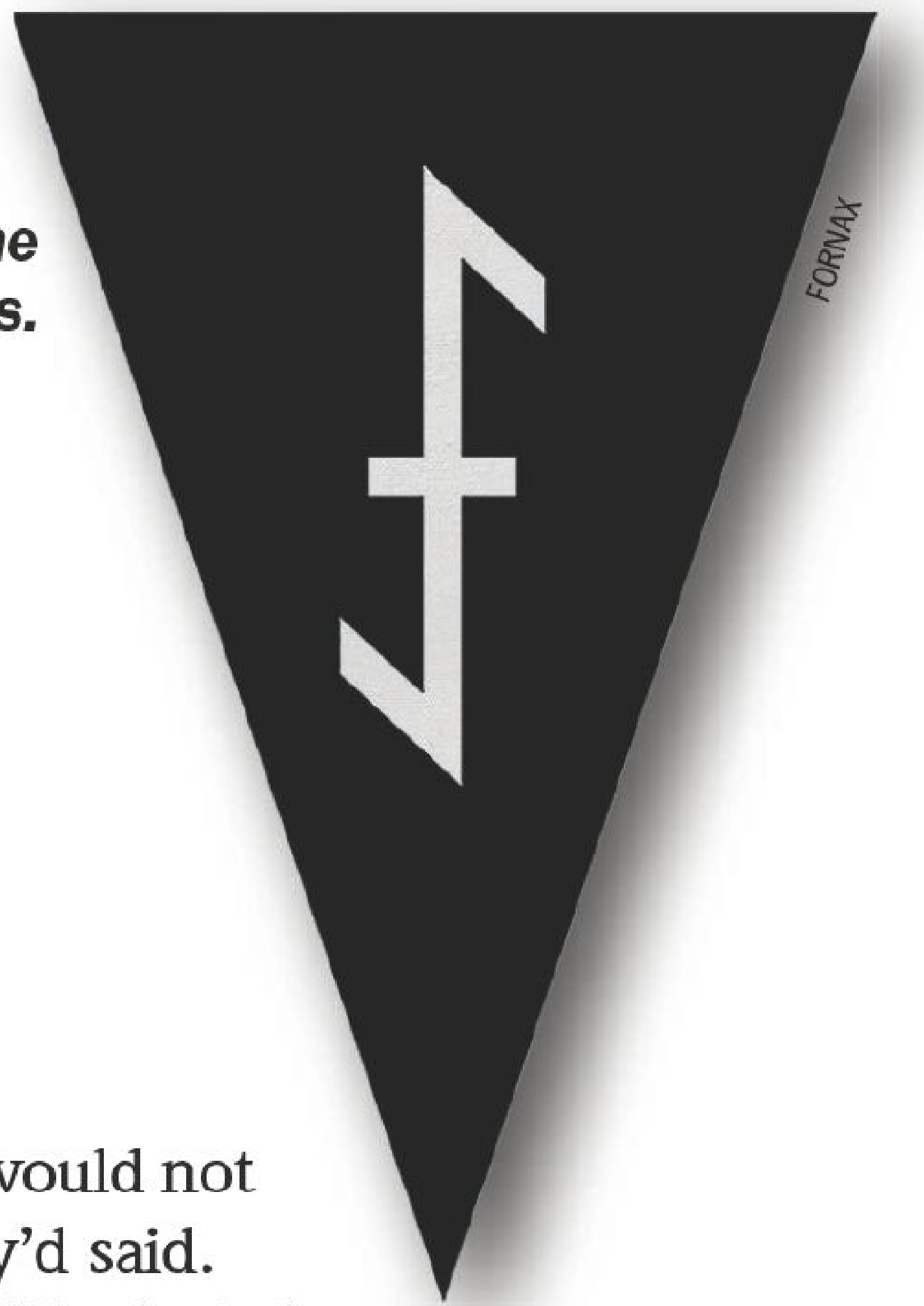
Neither of these claims have been substantiated.

Boys aged 16 to 18 from Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth) made up the majority of the recruits for Himmler's Werewolf Corps.
GETTY IMAGES

Himmler's Werewolves

FOUGHT TO THE LAST

From October 1944, Allied troops captured one German city after another. In response, Himmler unleashed his new Werewolf corps. Its task was to covertly attack the enemy and kill any German who betrayed Nazism.


The Werewolves emblem was inspired by the hunting hook used in medieval wolf traps.

FORNAX

Heinrich Himmler

BY ELSE CHRISTENSEN

It was 25th March 1945 and two figures lurked in the dark in front of Franz Oppenhoff's house. They were waiting for the chance to assassinate the city's mayor. Soon the cellar door swung open, and the mayor approached the two shadowy figures. When he was alongside them, one of the assassins raised his Walther pistol and aimed it at the mayor, but nothing happened. The assassin's hand was shaking and sweat beaded his upper lip; his finger was frozen on the trigger.

"Do it," his partner hissed furiously, but the assassin was unable to move.

"You cowardly sow!", his partner spat, tearing the pistol from the paralysed hitman's hand. Determined, he stepped forward, pointed the gun at Oppenhoff's temple, shouted "Heil Hitler" and pulled the trigger.

Hitler sent the hitmen

Oppenhoff had been at the top of the Nazis' hit list since the year before, when Aachen became the first German city to fall into enemy hands when US troops arrived on 21st October 1944.

After fierce fighting, the city was left a smouldering heap of ruins and thousands of citizens were suddenly homeless. Reluctantly, lawyer Franz Oppenhoff agreed to lead the work of getting them rehoused before the winter set in. He was installed as mayor with little ceremony, for no one doubted the risks involved with being seen to be cooperating with the Allies. The Nazis had made it clear that in the occupied parts of Germany, there should be no German civilian administration and no German judiciary. Anyone holding such offices would not survive a month, they'd said.

Although Oppenhoff had tried to avoid any publicity when he was sworn in as mayor, Hitler still heard about it a few days later. Furious, the Führer demanded that the "traitor" in Aachen be eliminated. No other German city had so much as thought of betraying the Fatherland in the same despicable way.

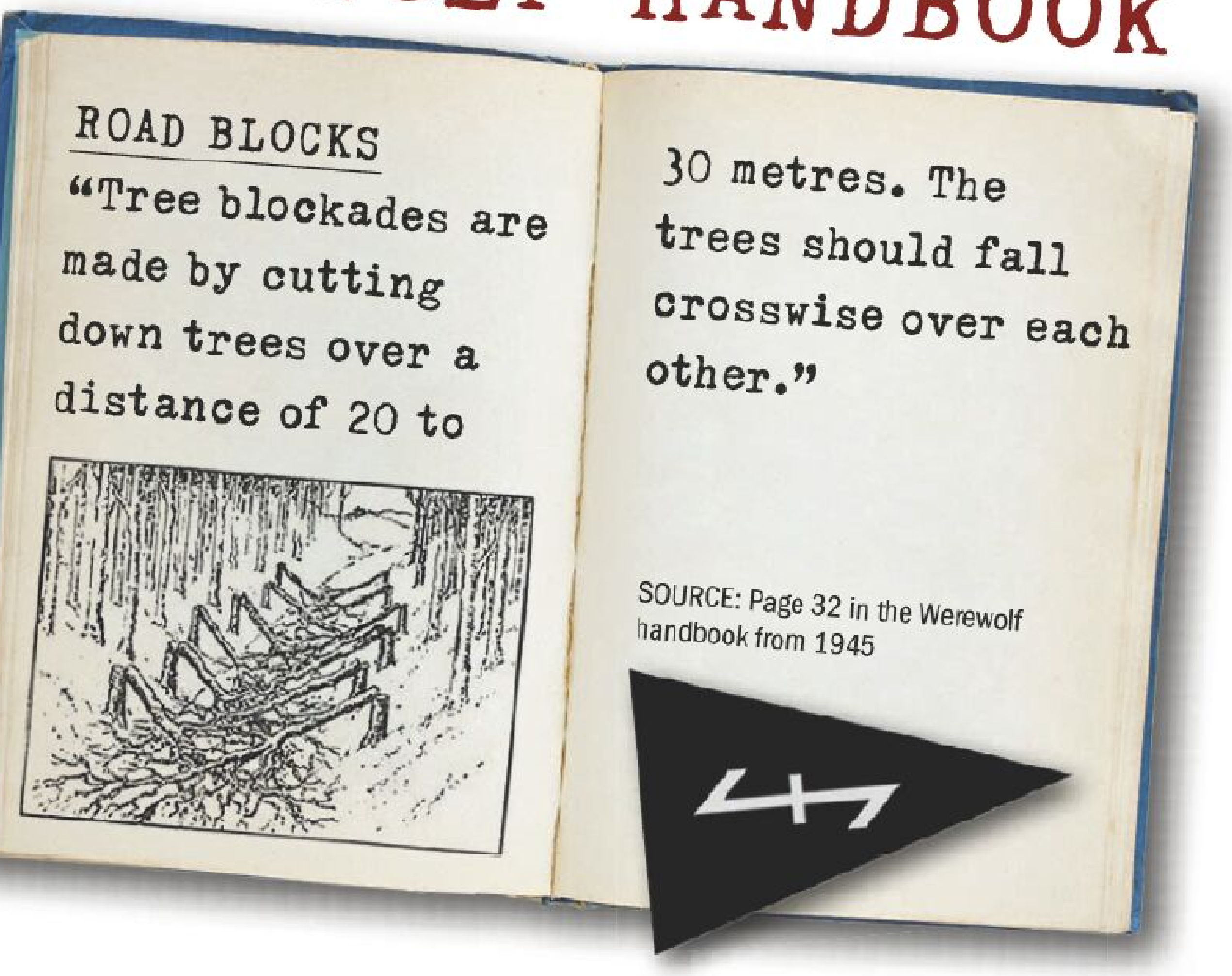
A few weeks earlier, SS leader Heinrich Himmler had set up a German guerrilla organisation to covertly attack and undermine the Allies as they moved into Germany. Himmler had christened the project *Unternehmen Werwolf* (Operation Werewolf) and now he offered to send his Werewolves to Aachen to assassinate the collaborator Oppenhoff. Hitler was thrilled.

Thousands signed up to fight

The leader of the Werewolf Corps was SS officer Hans-Adolf Prützmann, who was already recruiting volunteers for his corps. He was helped enormously in this task by Nazi propaganda that suggested all manner of misfortunes would befall ordinary German citizens if the enemy occupied their homeland.

By the end of the year, approximately 5,000 Werewolves were being trained at barracks across the country. Burly teenagers from the Nazi youth organization *Hitlerjugend* made up the majority of the Werewolves corps, while a few came from the corresponding ▶

WEREWOLF HANDBOOK


ROAD BLOCKS

"Tree blockades are made by cutting down trees over a distance of 20 to 30 metres. The trees should fall crosswise over each other."

SOURCE: Page 32 in the Werewolf handbook from 1945

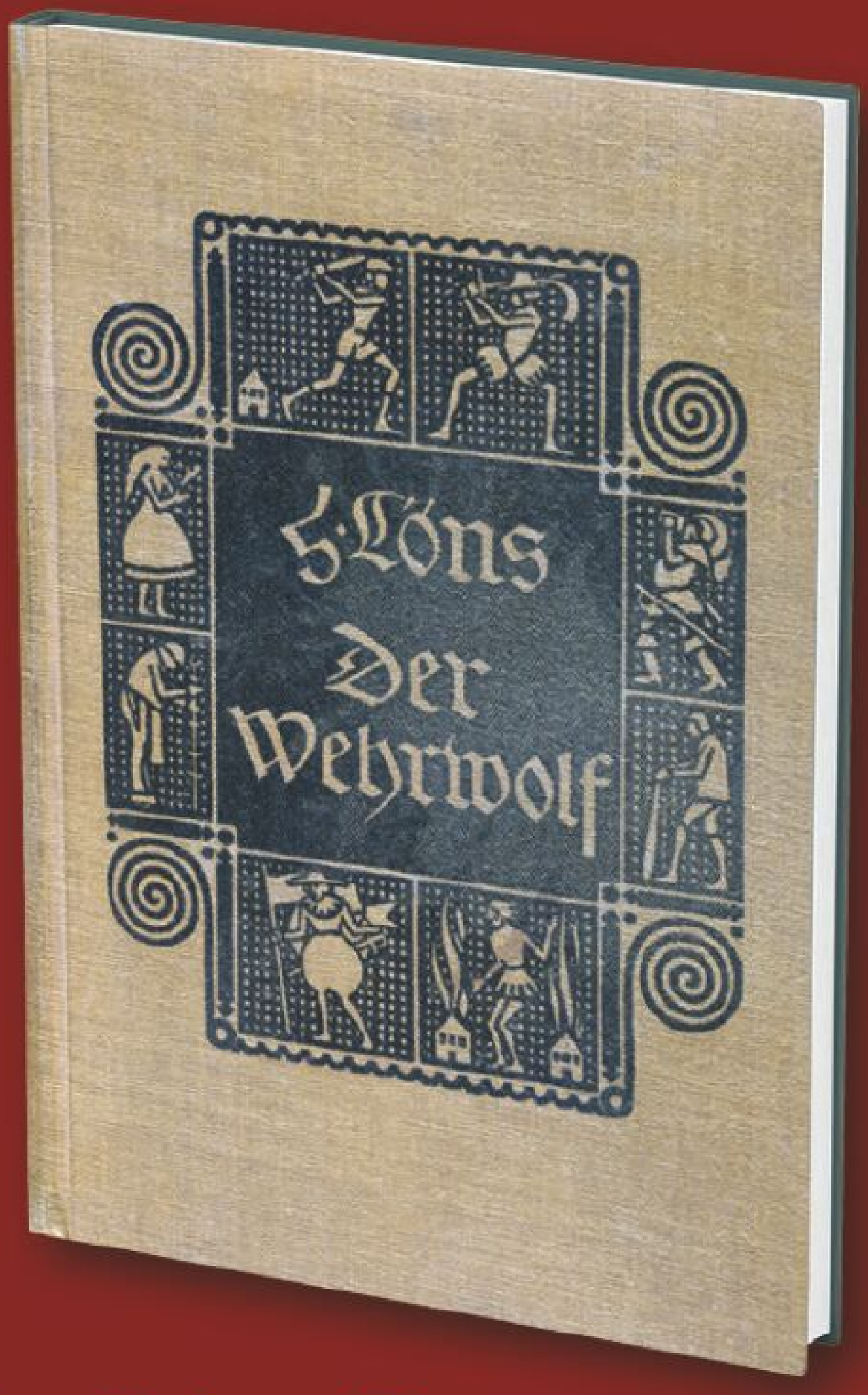
PALADIN PRESS & US ARMY & SHUTTERSTOCK

AKG-IMAGES

Corps was named after a bestseller

In 1910, the author Hermann Löns wrote the novel *Der Wehrwolf*. His werewolves were not supernatural beings, but members of a peasant army that defended their home against bandits during Europe's Thirty Years' War (1618-1648).

Himmler loved the story and named his guerrilla force after the army in the novel. The book became compulsory for German children near the end of the war.



***Der Wehrwolf* became a bestseller in Nazi Germany.**

Bund Deutscher Mädel (League of German Girls).

Hardened SS officers were in charge of the training, which typically lasted five weeks and included everything a guerilla needed to know: how to operate German and Allied weapons, use explosives, camouflage, and survive in the field.

An extensive Werewolf handbook with instructive drawings was used during the training, in which SS officers repeatedly emphasised that a Werewolf could trust no one. From now on, their lives belonged to the Führer.

At Schloss Hülchrath, a medieval castle near Düsseldorf, a small unit of recruits received particularly intensive training. The group was to carry out the corps' first task: the assassination of the mayor of Aachen.

Prützmann carefully selected the hit squad from among 50 recruits at the castle. He appointed SS officer Herbert Wenzel, the training officer at the school, to lead the group. Wenzel was given the task of planning the assassination and obtaining the necessary equipment. Another of the school's officers, Josef Leitgeb, became Wenzel's deputy. Leitgeb wasn't especially smart, but he was tall and muscular, and seemed fearless during training.

23-year-old Ilse Hirsch was selected to provide supplies. Hirsch, like most female Werewolves, had been a member of *Bund Deutscher Mädel* for years, which had helped to prepare her for her role. Like the last member of the group, 16-year-old Erich Morgenschweiss, she was a fanatical Nazi and ready to fight to the last for the Führer.

Two former border officers from near Aachen, Karl-Heinz Hennemann and Georg Heidorn, would serve as guides.

The plan was named Operation Carnival because the hit on Oppenhoff was originally scheduled to take place around the Catholic Mardi Gras celebration in February. However, their preparations weren't complete until 20th March, at which time the four Werewolves went into action.

Operation Carnival had a bad start

Shortly before midnight, the four Werewolves and their two guides parachuted from a plane over the forested region west of Aachen. Once safely on the ground, they hastily buried their parachutes and distributed their supplies. With their rucksacks full, the Werewolves set off towards the site where they had chosen to camp, but things quickly went wrong: a Dutch border guard suddenly appeared between the trees and fired several shots at the group. Morgenschweiss responded quickly, killing him with a well-placed shot. For safety's sake, they decided to split up and continue on alone.

Ilse Hirsch reached the city first. She discarded the German uniform she had been wearing, and entered Aachen in the early morning in a skirt and blouse.

With a stolen basket under her arm, she resembled the other women who went out every morning to look for food and firewood. An elderly woman willingly told her the way to Oppenhoff's house: the mayor lived on Eupener Strasse on the outskirts of the city, she said. Hirsch's heart was in her mouth as she knocked at the door, which was opened by the mayor's young housekeeper. Hirsch begged for a glass of water and was allowed to enter.

On the way down to the basement kitchen, Hirsch took note of every detail that could help the assassins.

The following day, Hirsch made contact with the rest of the group, and together they camped in the forest, a 90-minute walk away from Oppenhoff's house. The final details of the hit were worked out over the next few days.

Mine killed the killer

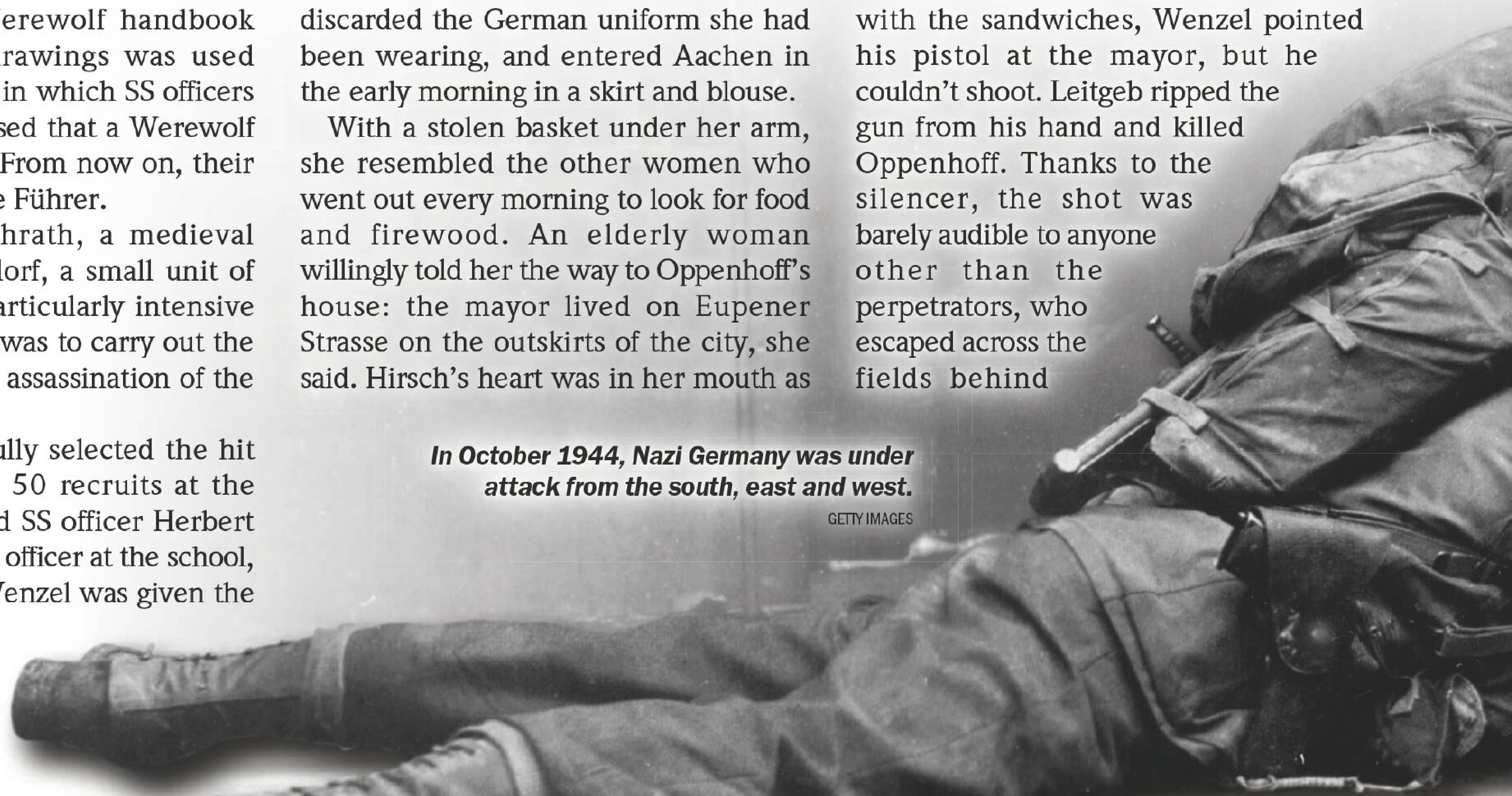
On Sunday 25th March, Wenzel and Leitgeb sneaked up to Oppenhoff's house disguised as German pilots. A little after 21.00, they crawled in through the basement window, while Hennemann kept watch outside.

The two men found only the housekeeper, who told them that Oppenhoff and his wife had gone to visit a neighbour. The couple's three children were asleep upstairs. The Werewolves asked the frightened housekeeper to fetch the mayor, saying that they urgently needed a pass so they could get through the US checkpoints and get back to the German lines, 100 km to the east.

She did as they asked, returning shortly afterwards with Oppenhoff by her side. He was easily recognisable by the special armband he wore, which identified him as the mayor of Aachen. The neighbour had come with him.

Oppenhoff refused to issue a pass. He explained that the war would be over in a few days and that it would be better for the pilots to surrender to the Americans. Then he went into the house to fetch some food for his hungry countrymen. The neighbour, sensing trouble, disappeared to look for a US patrol.

When Oppenhoff came back outside with the sandwiches, Wenzel pointed his pistol at the mayor, but he couldn't shoot. Leitgeb ripped the gun from his hand and killed Oppenhoff. Thanks to the silencer, the shot was barely audible to anyone other than the perpetrators, who escaped across the fields behind



In October 1944, Nazi Germany was under attack from the south, east and west.

GETTY IMAGES

Oppenhoff's house before the Americans summoned by the neighbour could arrive.

The Werewolf unit met up in the forest and fled towards the German lines, but the assassin Leitgeb didn't get far: two days later he stepped on a mine and was blown to bits. Later, the group triggered another landmine, which wounded Hirsch, Morgenschweiss and Heidorn, but they managed to reach safety, along with Hennemann.

The Werewolves left calling cards

Two weeks after the murder of Oppenhoff, Himmler's Werewolves struck again. On 9th April 1945, employees of the town hall in the small US-occupied town of Kirchlengern found Mayor Wilhelm Pieper lying dead in his office. He had been shot. At his feet lay a card with the word "traitor", written in red. The card bore the stamp *"Die Werwölfe"* ("The Werewolves").

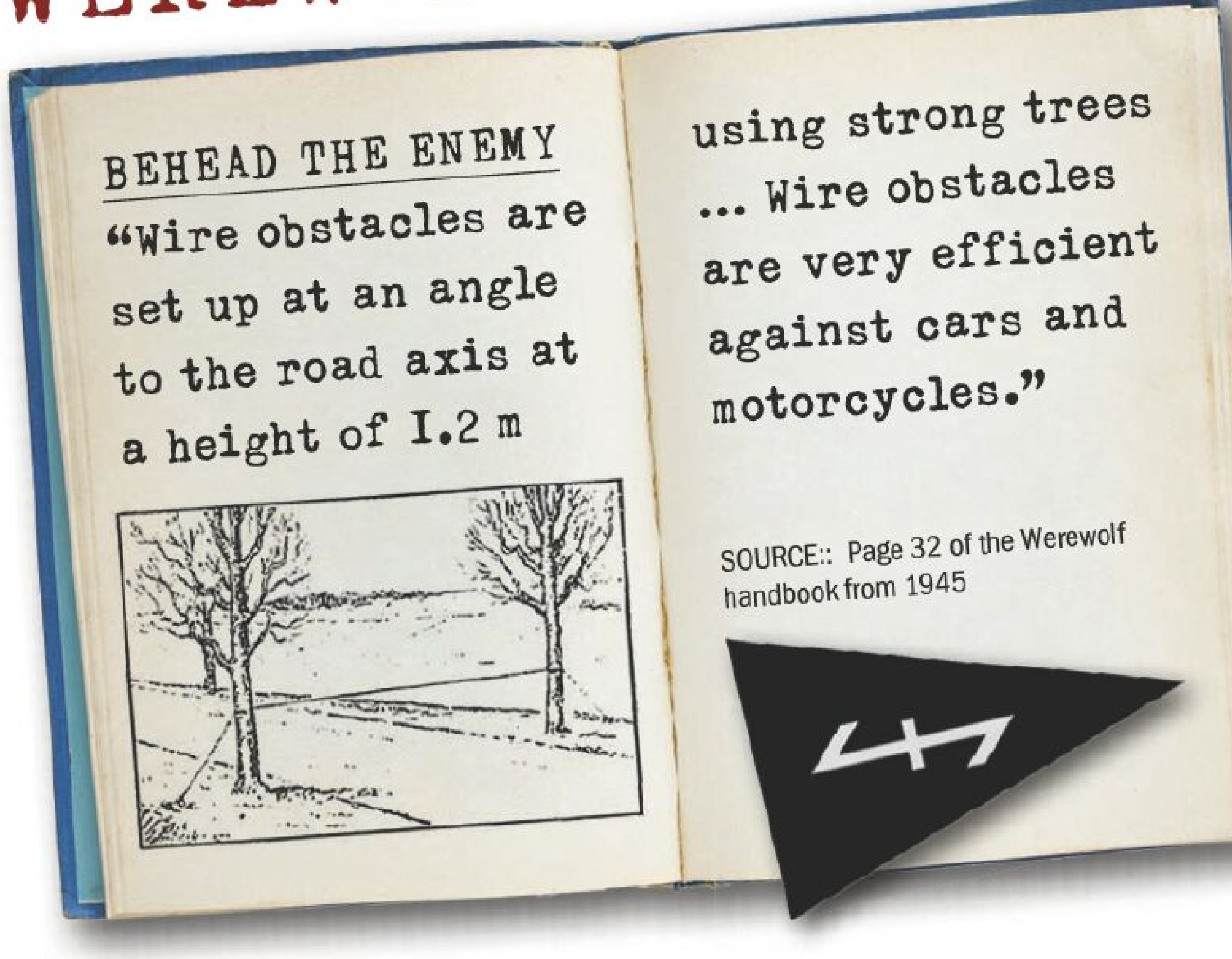
Like Oppenhoff, Pieper's only crime had been trying to help his city's citizens survive the last harsh weeks of the war.

As the Allies penetrated deeper and deeper into Germany, the Werewolf units began cracking down on ordinary Germans who dared to say that the war could no longer be won.

A farmer in Dötlingen was shot for saying that Allied troops would execute local Nazi leaders when they took Lower Saxony, for example, while in Berlin, Werewolves fatally stabbed a professor for throwing his uniform into a lake in the Charlottenburg district.

Other actions focused on the advancing enemy. Werewolf units derailed trains that were supplying the Allies, cut telephone lines, meddled with road signs and destroyed roads. Not surprisingly, the Werewolves were most active in the east, where Soviet troops were advancing in an unstoppable wave.

WEREWOLF HANDBOOK



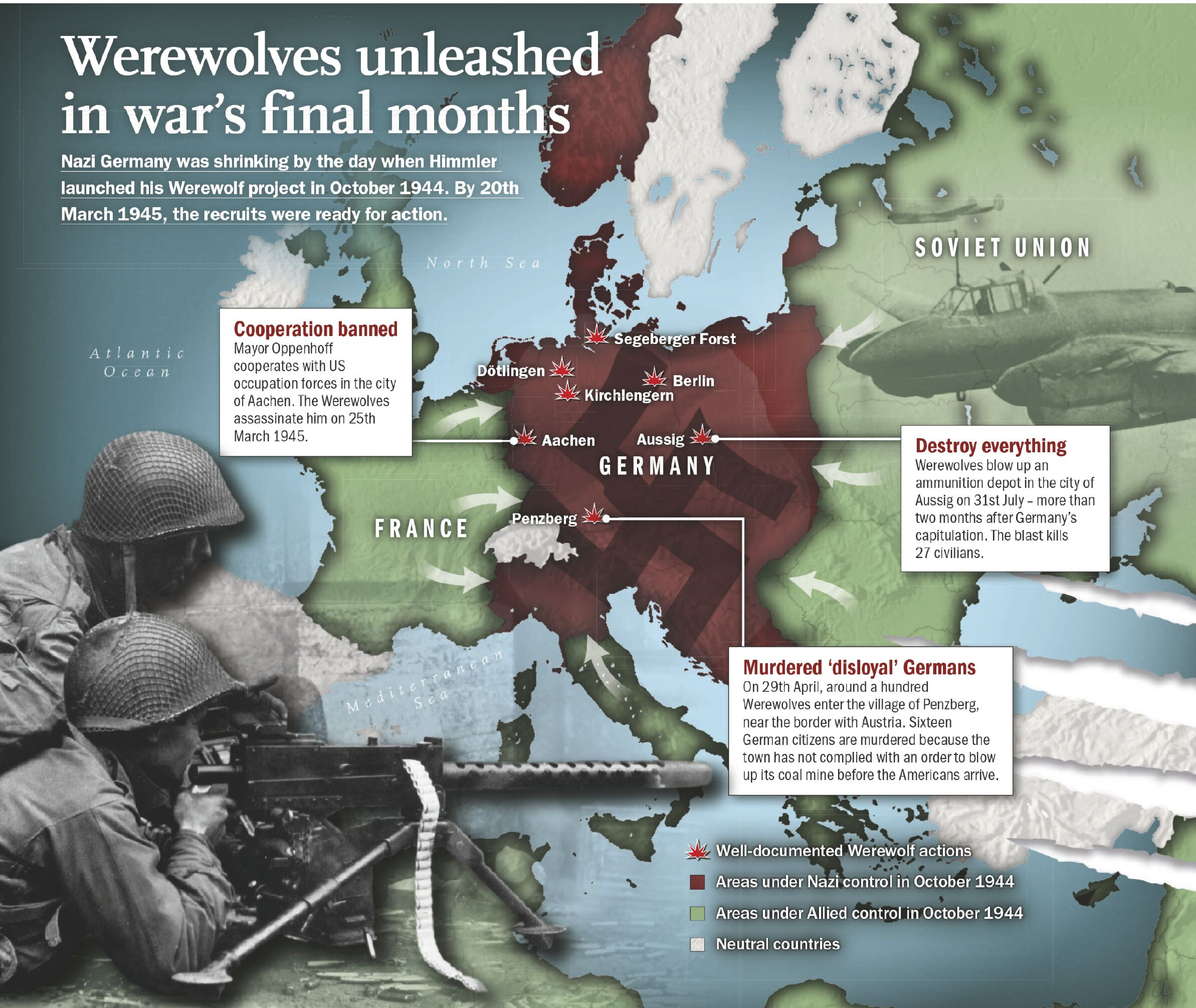
BEHEAD THE ENEMY

"Wire obstacles are set up at an angle to the road axis at a height of 1.2 m using strong trees ... Wire obstacles are very efficient against cars and motorcycles."

SOURCE:: Page 32 of the Werewolf handbook from 1945

PALADIN PRESS & US ARMY & SHUTTERSTOCK

The atrocities committed by the Soviet soldiers, including massacring civilians ▶



Werewolves unleashed in war's final months

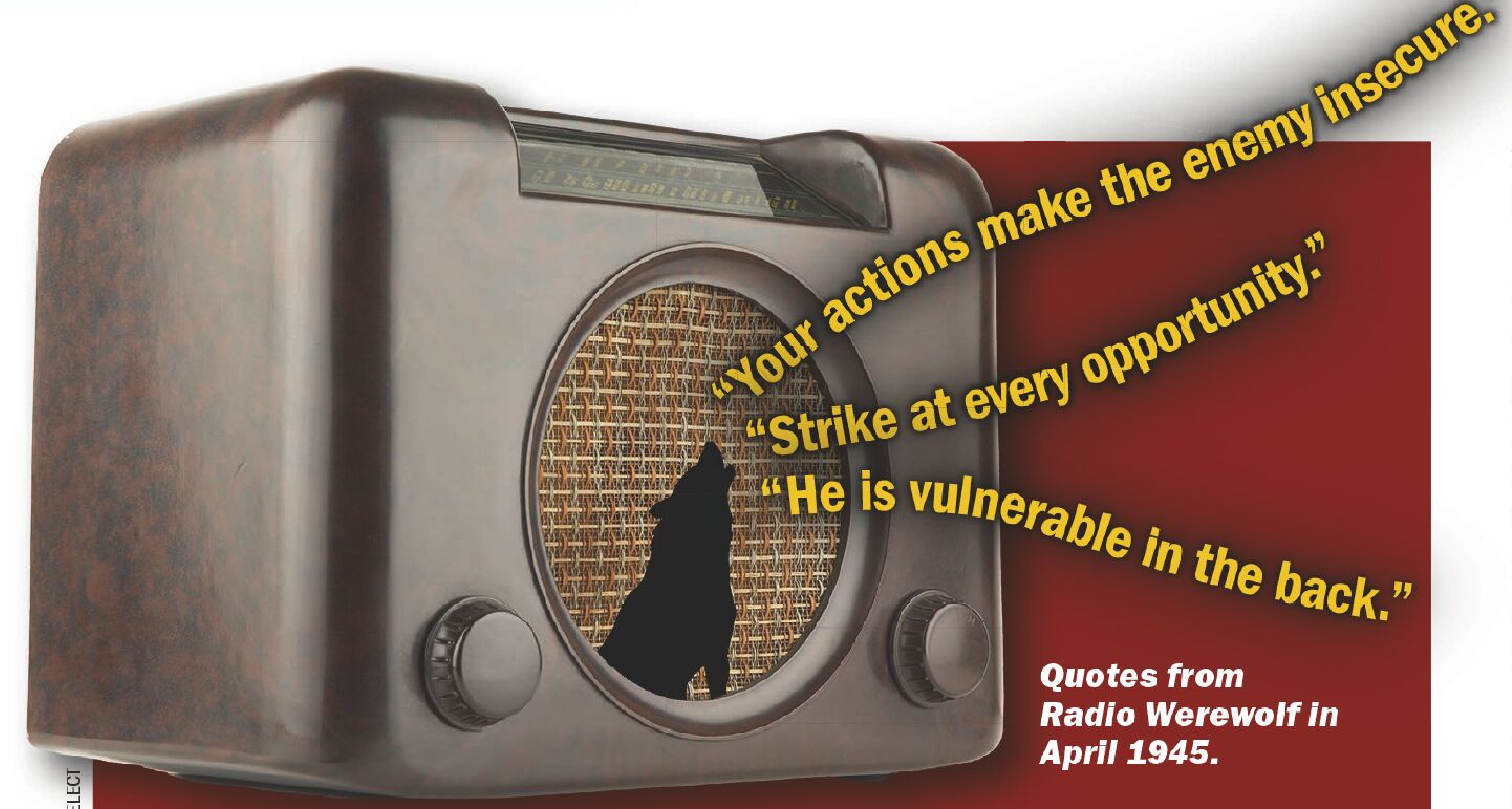
Nazi Germany was shrinking by the day when Himmler launched his Werewolf project in October 1944. By 20th March 1945, the recruits were ready for action.

Cooperation banned
Mayor Oppenhoff cooperates with US occupation forces in the city of Aachen. The Werewolves assassinate him on 25th March 1945.

Destroy everything
Werewolves blow up an ammunition depot in the city of Aussig on 31st July – more than two months after Germany's capitulation. The blast kills 27 civilians.

Murdered 'disloyal' Germans
On 29th April, around a hundred Werewolves enter the village of Penzberg, near the border with Austria. Sixteen German citizens are murdered because the town has not complied with an order to blow up its coal mine before the Americans arrive.

- ✸ Well-documented Werewolf actions
- 🟥 Areas under Nazi control in October 1944
- 🟩 Areas under Allied control in October 1944
- ⬜ Neutral countries



"Your actions make the enemy insecure."

"Strike at every opportunity."

"He is vulnerable in the back."

Quotes from Radio Werewolf in April 1945.

IMAGESELECT

Radio propaganda intimidated the Allies

While the Werewolves' were up against a superior enemy, Radio Werewolf made the Allies fear guerrilla warfare in Germany.

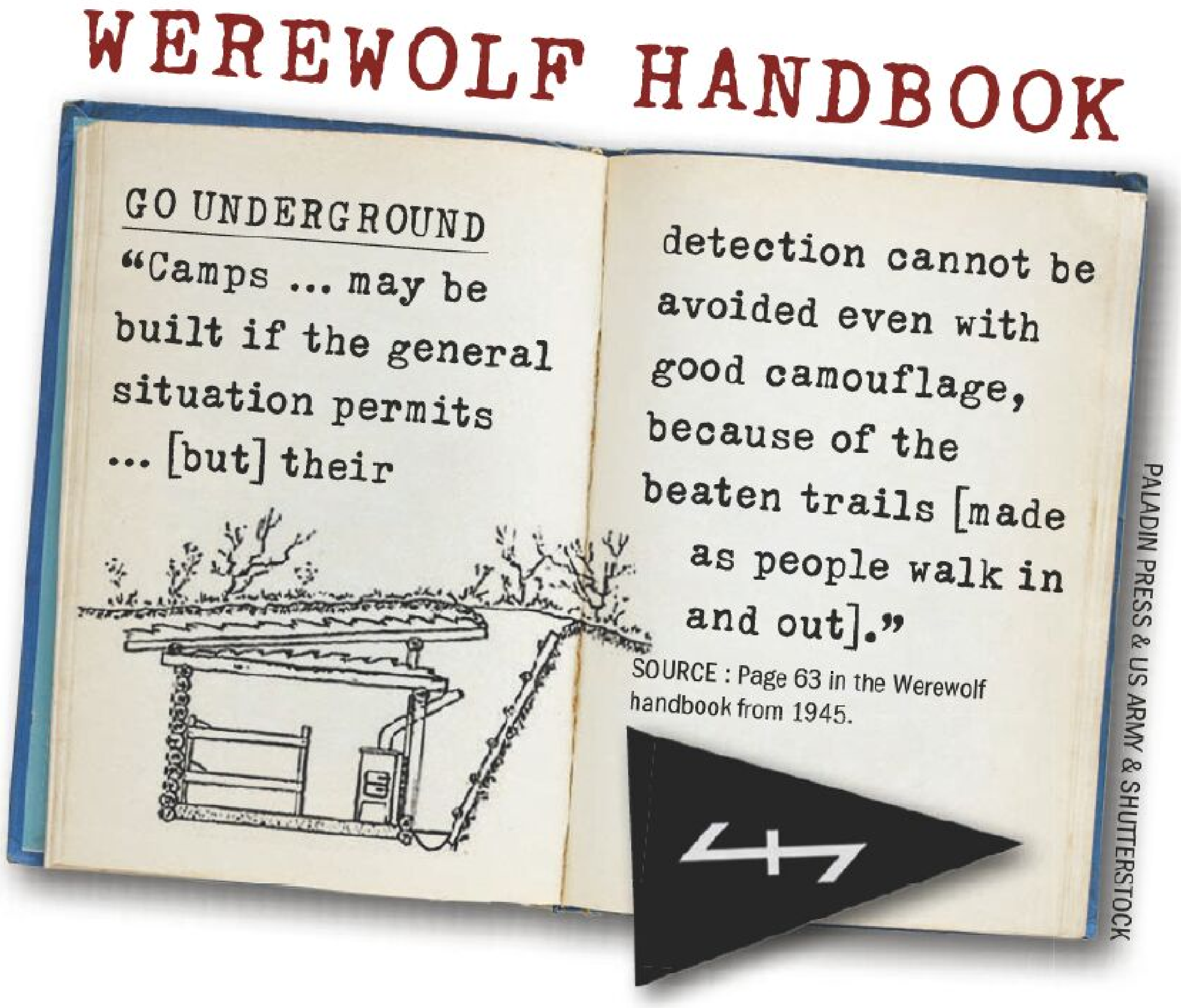
Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels launched Radio Werewolf on 1st April 1945. Its daily broadcasts encouraged people to continue to fight even after their city had been occupied by the Allies.

The station's first broadcast included the rallying cry: "Hatred is our prayer and revenge is our war cry. Woe to the foreigners who torture and oppress our people, but threefold woe to the traitors among our own people who help them."

The broadcasts made the Americans and Soviets fear a popular uprising in occupied Germany – even long after Radio Werewolf went silent. On 23rd April 1945, the Russians captured the radio station in Nauen, near Berlin.

and raping German women, brought more recruits to the Werewolf corps, but the guerrillas' actions remained scattered and without appreciable effect.

One of the reasons the Werewolves only carried out small-scale operations against the Soviets was the corps' chronic lack of weapons. When Himmler was drawing up plans for a commando-style organisation to operate behind enemy lines, he envisioned countless weapons caches being dug within Germany's forests. Then, as the army and SS divisions withdrew, the Werewolf units could dig up the equipment and strike at the enemy with destructive force. Once a mission had been carried out, they could melt back into the forest and restock for the next action. The realities, however, were quite different. By early 1945 both the army and the SS were desperately short of weapons, and neither were willing to hand over their dwindling supplies of arms to mere boys.



WEREWOLF HANDBOOK

GO UNDERGROUND

"Camps ... may be built if the general situation permits ... [but] their detection cannot be avoided even with good camouflage, because of the beaten trails [made as people walk in and out]."

SOURCE: Page 63 in the Werewolf handbook from 1945.

PALADIN PRESS & US ARMY & SHUTTERSTOCK

Few secret weapons caches were therefore available when the Werewolves assembled for action, and the contents usually proved to be disappointing: there were neither panzerfaust anti-tank weapons nor even pistols with sufficient ammunition.

Fear of Werewolves increased

German radio and newspapers in March and April 1945 painted a completely different picture of the Werewolves. The media described them as a fearsome force that hurled itself at the enemy. The propaganda made the Allies so fearful that they cracked down hard in on anyone suspected of being a Werewolf.

Many German civilians were worried that the Werewolves' acts of sabotage would ultimately lead to collective punishment and reprisals – few, however, were brave enough to say it out loud. In March 1945, the mayor of Olpe, near Cologne, did speak up, saying that the: "Heaviest punishment will follow up lawless actions not only for the individual himself but also for all of us".

The influential doctor Hermann Herzog from Blankenburg agreed, suggesting that: "for each [Allied officer] 'bumped off', ten innocents – perhaps more – will be stood before the wall."

However, the hunt for Werewolves only had fatal consequences a few months later.

Revenge led to massacre

As Germany neared collapse, individual Nazis set up their own Werewolf groups, which they used for private revenge. Among them was Hans Zöberlein – a former member of Hitler's SA.

In April 1945, Zöberlein and his henchmen patrolled the towns of Upper Bavaria looking for white flags or breaches of the commander's so-called Nero command, which ordered the Germans to apply scorched earth tactics to the Allied troops. All factories, power plants and roads had to be destroyed to slow down the advance of the enemy.

A coal mine in Penzberg, near the border with Austria, was deemed to be one of the resources that must not fall into US hands. However, the majority of the town's inhabitants earned their living from the mine, and therefore on 28th April they deposed the city's Nazi mayor before he could blow the mine.

German troops arrived and executed the coup's eight instigators on the spot. But this was not enough for Zöberlein, who had long despised the inhabitants' ambivalent attitude towards Nazism. On the night of 29th April, Zöberlein's Werewolves spread through the town murdering critics of the Nazi regime and dispatching a list of Zöberlein's personal enemies. Some managed to escape, but eight people, including a heavily pregnant woman, were lynched. When US forces reached Penzberg the next day, the bodies were still swinging, each with a sign saying "SS Werwolf, Upper Bavaria" around their neck.

Hitler committed suicide on 30th April. In his will, he left his thousand year realm to Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz,

SIGNAL, SEPTEMBER 1940

In the summer of 1940, Ilse Hirsch graced the cover of the German army's magazine Signal.

Oppenhoff's murderers got off lightly

The trial against Franz Oppenhoff's killers was heard in 1949 in a West German court. The Werewolves were charged with the murder of an innocent civilian but, thanks to their lawyer, all got off lightly.

The Werewolves' defender claimed that Oppenhoff had been in uniform in 1944. Under wartime laws, he was therefore a deserter and could be executed without a trial.

■ Ilse Hirsch was acquitted. In sentencing, the court accepted that she had blindly trusted the Nazi regime, believing that "state and individual are one … and everything is legal which is of aid to Germany and ordered from above."

■ The guides, Karl-Heinz Hennemann and Georg Heidorn, were sentenced to 12 and 18 months in prison.

■ The then 16-year-old Erich Morgenschweiss was not charged. He testified against his accomplices.

■ Herbert Wenzel fled abroad after the war and disappeared without a trace.

who almost immediately began peace talks with the Allies.

On 6th May 1945, the admiral made an urgent radio appeal to the Werewolves, asking that "all German men and women ... abstain from any underground fighting activity in the Werwolf or any other organisations in the enemy-occupied western territories, since such activity can only be to the detriment of our people."

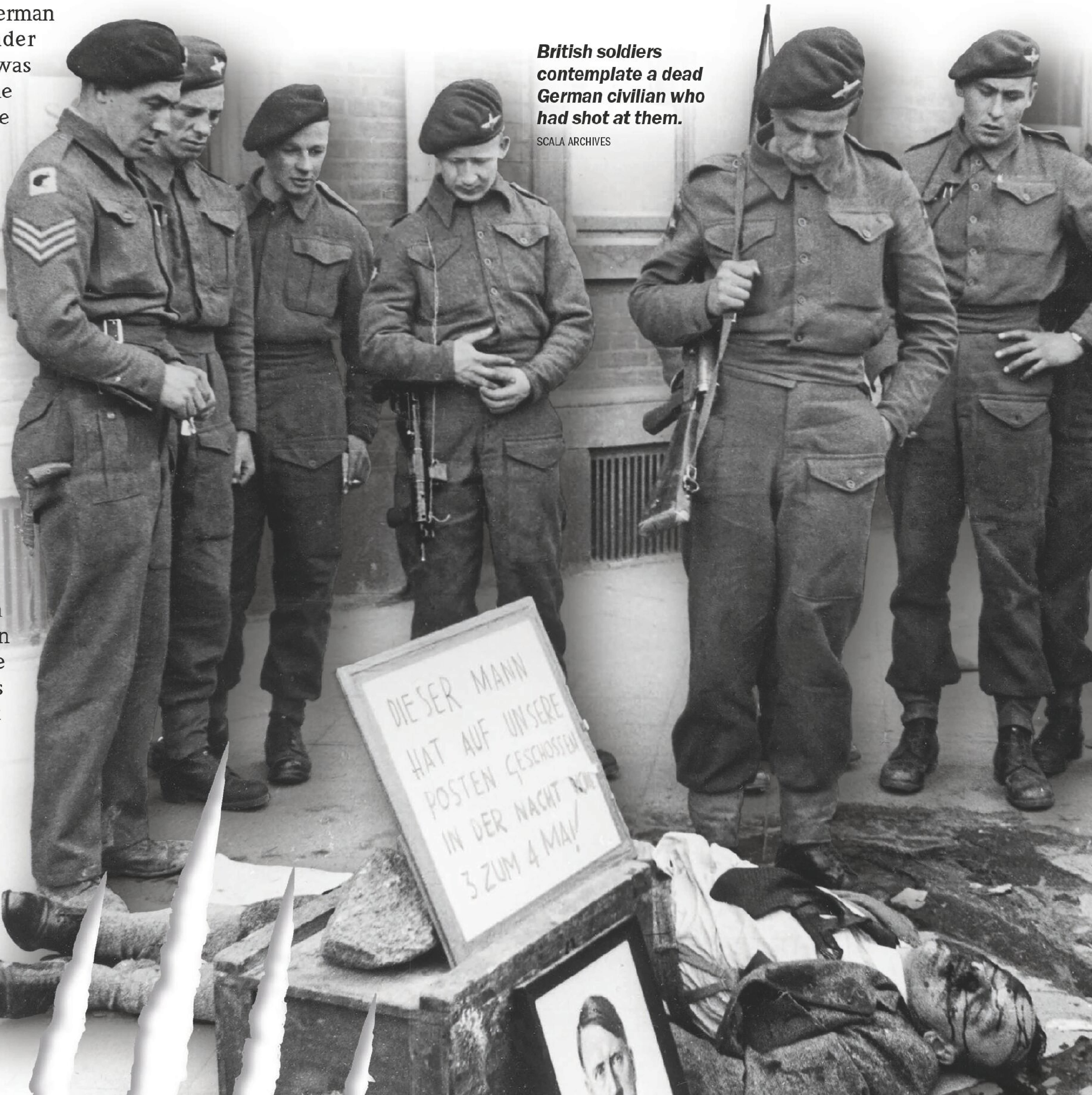
Two days later, the German Instrument of Surrender was signed. The war was over. However, not all the Werewolves gave up the fight immediately. Together with some SS troops, a number of them entrenched themselves in the large Segeberger forest north of Hamburg, where they held out against Britain's 11th Armoured Division.

When Dönitz heard that the guerrillas were refusing to lay down their arms, he sent paratroopers to the area, with British consent. The fighting raged for two days, with Germans firing on Germans. By the time the last Werewolves surrendered, the forest was thick with corpses.

5,000 youths died

In other parts of Germany, small Werewolf units continued to blow up bridges, set buildings on fire and set makeshift traps on the roads. In eastern Germany, Soviet troops hunted down the Werewolves – five months after Germany's capitulation, intelligence chief Lavrentey Beria told Stalin that 359 Werewolf units had been "liquidated."

During 1945 and 1946, the Soviets arrested around 10,000 German teens for being members of Werewolf groups. Under torture, many of them confessed that they had not yet been in action, but had been "waiting" for the right moment to strike. As many as 5,000 Werewolves died in Soviet prison camps. According to reports from Allied soldiers, some Werewolf units continued to operate until 1949, when East and West Germany came into being.



British soldiers contemplate a dead German civilian who had shot at them.

SCALA ARCHIVES

Hitler's madness *intensified in the final days of the Third Reich. In the Führerbunker in Berlin, those around him bore witness to his rapid decline.*

Führerbunker 1945

HITLER'S DOWNFALL

> ” I have already taken my decision. I will never leave Berlin again; I will defend the capital with my dying breath.
>
> **Adolf Hitler**

As the Allies crushed Germany, Hitler entrenched himself in the Führerbunker deep beneath Berlin. With him stood a group of devoted aides who had served him for years and would not abandon him in the face of disaster. Down in the bunker, they awaited the inevitable defeat as Hitler's madness grew.

By Troels Ussing

Hitler was used to being celebrated with pomp and circumstance on his birthday, but on 20th April 1945, he was almost ten metres underground, shielded from the outside world by layers of metres-thick concrete. For weeks Hitler had barricaded himself in the Führerbunker under the Reich Chancellery gardens as the city above him waited nervously for the enemy to march into its streets. In the damp and smelly basement, the once powerful leader of the Third Reich worked, ate and slept in small, low-ceilinged rooms separated from each other by narrow steel doors – a chilly underworld that most closely resembled the cabins and corridors found in a ship's keel, far beneath the water's surface.

The Führer had been congratulated earlier in the day by his faithful followers, headed by the skeletal Joseph Goebbels, but as dusk fell above, the 56-year-old birthday boy now sat in his study in the company of his mistress Eva Braun and his secretaries. Their glasses contained champagne, which 25-year-old secretary Traudl Junge occasionally sipped, but she had to look far and wide for any festive mood on this evening.

"In the evening we sat crammed together in the little study. Hitler was silent, staring into space. We too asked him if he wouldn't leave Berlin. 'No, I can't,' he replied. 'I must bring things to a head here in Berlin – or go under!' We said nothing, and the champagne we were drinking to Hitler's health tasted insipid," Junge later wrote in her memoirs.

Hitler had made his choice. He would stay in Berlin and await his fate. The Führer rose early from the table, broke up the birthday party and retired to his private quarters in the adjoining room.

"But Eva Braun came back once she had led Hitler to his room. A restless fire burned in her eyes. She had on a new dress made of silvery blue brocade; it was meant to be worn to a party at the side of the man she loved. Hitler hadn't noticed it. And he hadn't noticed that there were four young women at his table who wanted to live, who had believed in him, who had hoped for victory from him.

"Eva Braun wanted to numb the fear that had awoken in her heart. She wanted to celebrate again, even when there was nothing left to celebrate, she wanted to dance, to drink, to forget… Eva Braun carried off everyone she met on her way through the bunker up to her old living room on the first floor which was still intact, although the good furniture was down in the bunker now. Eva Braun wanted to dance! Never mind who with, she whirled everyone away in a desperate frenzy, like a woman who has already felt the faint breath of death. We drank champagne, there was shrill laughter, and I laughed too because I didn't want to cry… No one said anything about war, victory or death. This was a party given by ghosts," Junge later recounted of the scene in the Reich Chancellery.

Hitler was a broken man

In his small bedroom in the Führerbunker, Hitler heard nothing of the party up in the Reich Chancellery. On the other hand, he was rudely awoken the next day at 09.30 by a constant banging noise from overhead – the Red Army's intensive artillery bombardment of Berlin had begun. The Führer angrily got out of bed and, unshaven, opened the metal door to one of the Führerbunker's corridors, where his SS adjutant, Otto Günsche, and General Wilhelm Burgdorf stood.

"What's going on?" yelled the Führer, a lock of hair hanging limply over one eye. *"Where's this firing coming from?"*

Burgdorf replied that parts of central Berlin were under fire from heavy Soviet artillery. Hitler remained silent for a moment, clearly shaken.

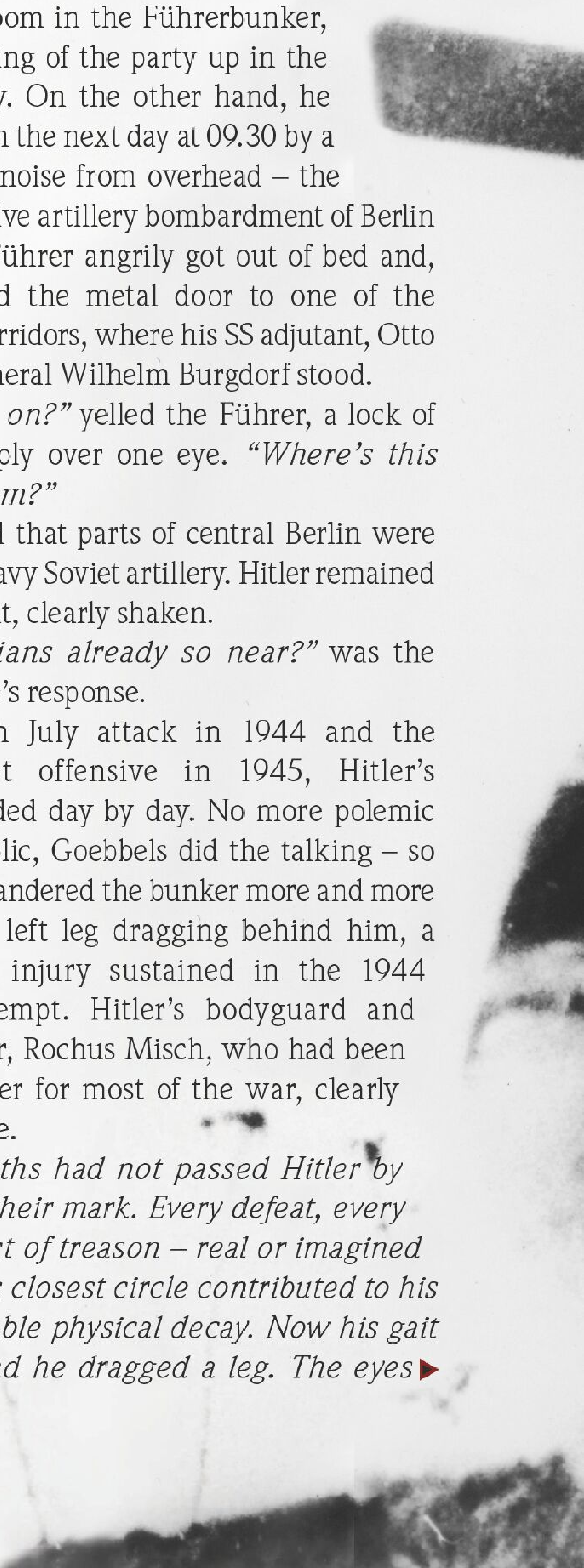
"Are the Russians already so near?" was the rattled Nazi leader's response.

Since the 20th July attack in 1944 and the successful Soviet offensive in 1945, Hitler's leadership had faded day by day. No more polemic speeches – in public, Goebbels did the talking – so now the Führer wandered the bunker more and more apathetically, his left leg dragging behind him, a reminder of the injury sustained in the 1944 assassination attempt. Hitler's bodyguard and telephone operator, Rochus Misch, who had been close to the Führer for most of the war, clearly noticed the change.

"The last months had not passed Hitler by without leaving their mark. Every defeat, every setback, every act of treason – real or imagined – from within his closest circle contributed to his clearly recognisable physical decay. Now his gait was sluggish, and he dragged a leg. The eyes ▶

FACTS

For much of the war, Hitler stayed at the Wolf's Lair in what is now Poland, from where he was better able to direct the **fighting on the Eastern Front.** From 16th January 1945, however, the Führerbunker in Berlin became Hitler's primary residence.



Hitler's faithful secretary
Traudl Junge remained in the Führerbunker with Hitler and saw the madness with her own eyes.

THE REASON WHY...

...Hitler didn't try to escape Berlin

Adolf Hitler had realised that defeat was imminent as the Red Army stood at the gates of Berlin. For the Führer, staying and dying in the battle for the capital would create the best narrative.

On Hitler's birthday and in the days that followed, Goebbels, Ribbentrop, Himmler and Dönitz all tried to persuade the Führer to leave Berlin while there was still time and flee south to his country estate at Berghof, in the Bavarian Obersalzberg. From there he could take command of the southern armies.

But Hitler refused – mainly because he feared being captured alive. Escaping Berlin would be no easy matter, and if the Soviets were to take him alive, it would be a major propaganda victory for Stalin. Hitler did not want to be portrayed as a pathetic, dethroned dictator. It would be such a blow to his ego that he was determined to take his own life before the Allies got their hands on him.

For Hitler, dying in Berlin was a fitting way to end his era. In this way, his death would coincide with that of the Reich's capital – amid shattered monuments and flame-swept buildings – and thus create the proper legend of the leader who fell with his people. During a meeting with Albert Speer on 23rd April 1945, Hitler took great satisfaction in the fact that his respected minister of armaments had just expressed the view that Berlin should be the Führer's final destination:

"Spontaneously, I advised him to stay in Berlin. What would he do at Obersalzberg? With Berlin gone, the war would be over in any case, I said. 'It seems to me better, if it must be, that you end your life here in the capital as the Führer rather than in your weekend house,'" Speer advised.

"I too have resolved to stay here. I only wanted to hear your view once more," Hitler replied.

Commit suicide in Berlin, *Albert Speer (left) advised his Führer. In this way, the legend of Hitler would grow.*

often seemed to have no fixed point, while his sense of balance seemed disturbed. Above all, in his every movement he had slowed, and all in all he looked to me like an old man. His left hand trembled distinctly, something I had not noticed before, and though he did not fumble when accepting despatches, now he always used his right hand," Misch wrote in his memoirs.

During his visits to the Führerbunker, Minister of Armaments Albert Speer also noted how Hitler displayed signs of weakness that he had never shown before, when it had always been important for him to appear as a strong leader.

"When heavy bombs exploded in the vicinity this massive bunker shook... Hitler would give a start. What had become of the formerly fearless corporal of the First World War?" Speer wrote.

Traudl Junge had not known the Führer for as long as Misch and Speer. The secretary had become part of Hitler's office staff in December 1942, but although the fortunes of war were just beginning to turn for the Nazis at that point, her boss had then appeared quite different. The recklessness and determination of that time, the glowing and sparkling eyes, seemed a distant memory in the April days underground in 1945. The Führer that Junge and her colleagues had looked up to and in whose hands they'd placed their lives behaved at moments almost like a frightened little child:

"He retreated to be with his dogs, which were now being kept in a cubicle near the lavatories. Then he sat in silence on the little bench in the corridor with the puppy on his lap, watching people coming and going... A hopelessly disappointed man, toppled from the greatest heights, broken, lonely."

Hitler had also lost his astonishing grasp of detail and statistics, which he had previously used to effectively put his doubters in their place. He no longer displayed the same authority and vigour around the conference table. On the other hand, the Führer's baleful outbursts of anger grew in frequency as his staff provided updates and reports in the bunker's small conference room. Junge and Misch could hear the Führer's voice cutting through the steel door during the daily meetings when Hitler became dissatisfied with the course of the war and the generals' proposed solutions. According to the bodyguard, Hitler now trusted no one:

"Over the last few months he had grown increasingly distrustful of

> **You will see – the Russians are about to suffer the bloodiest defeat of their history at the gates of Berlin!** ■ Adolf Hitler.

his entourage, and now, shortly before the defeat, this distrust reached its zenith. Behind every contradiction he detected treachery; everywhere he suspected disinformation. He was fidgety, nervous and looked depressed."

As Hitler sat at the table in the bunker's conference room on 21st April, he was still struggling to comprehend that the Red Army was already so close to Berlin that its shells could reach the city. Military advisers Wilhelm Keitel, Alfred Jodl, Hans Krebs, Wilhelm Burgdorf and Martin Bormann could do nothing but share Hitler's despair, but the fact remained that Zhukov's troops were rapidly approaching the outskirts of the German capital.

Hitler concocted outlandish plans

Hitler and his staff clung to what hopes they could of victory. The enemy's advancing column north of the capital was long and therefore a vulnerable target. Here the Soviets might be hit. When word came that Colonel-General Gotthard Heinrici, commanding Army Group Vistula, had assembled a reserve under SS-Obergruppenführer Felix Steiner, Hitler's mood suddenly improved. He trusted an SS man like Steiner and stripped Heinrici of his reserve army. Instead, Steiner was to cut the advancing Soviet lines and reach Berlin that way.

"You [Steiner], personally, are answerable with your head for the execution of this order. The fate of the Reich capital depends on the success of your mission," the Führer said.

Hitler himself was immediately pleased with his plan, and his staff officers saw he was more hopeful than he had been for a long time.

"You will see – the Russians are about to suffer the bloodiest defeat of their history at the gates of Berlin!" Hitler confidently predicted to his officers.

The next day, however, the Führer woke up to another shock. Steiner's troops had not moved from their location, never mind spearheaded an advance during the morning. The SS senior group leader had tacitly decided not to follow Hitler's orders.

Steiner had bitterly informed Heinrici that he had barely any artillery, only a handful of tanks and a few anti-aircraft guns. Both men refused to send their soldiers straight to their deaths. Instead, Steiner ordered his troops away from Berlin to save them from Soviet captivity.

Traudl Junge and her colleagues clearly felt the *"feverish restlessness"* that characterised the bunker the morning after the news:

"The doors of Hitler's conference room are closed. There's an agitated discussion in progress behind them … We hear voices rising and falling. Hitler shouts something, but we can't make out what. Martin Bormann comes out looking agitated and hands Fraulein Kriiger some sheets to be typed out immediately. For a moment we see uniformed backs bent over the street map of Berlin. The meeting looks baffled. Distraught, we move back into the anteroom, where we smoke, wait, whisper."

In the centre of Berlin *was the Führerbunker, which would become Hitler's final residence.*

Behind the conference room doors, Hitler had been cursing and swearing at Steiner, almost purple in the face. The Führer's voice cracked repeatedly as he screamed about *"cowardice, treachery, incompetence, insubordination, disloyalty"*. He finally announced to the staff what he had hinted to the secretaries and Braun on his birthday:

"I have already taken my decision. I will never leave Berlin again; I will defend the capital with my dying breath. Either I direct the battle for the Reich capital … or I shall go down with my troops in Berlin, fighting for the symbol of the Reich," Hitler said with his usual sense of pathos, before proclaiming that he would shoot himself when and if the time came.

When the heavy steel door to the conference room finally opened, Junge noticed all the officers had *"white, stony faces"*. Hitler himself trudged towards his study, passing his secretary who was standing with Braun in the corridor:

"All the expression has vanished from his face; his eyes are blank. He looks like his own death mask. He says, 'Get changed at once. A plane is leaving in an hour and will take you south. All is lost, hopelessly lost.'

"I am frozen rigid … Eva Braun is the first to rouse herself. She goes towards Hitler, who has already placed his hand on the handle of his door, takes both his hands and says, smiling and in the comforting tones you might use to a sad child, 'But you know I shall stay with you. I'm not letting you send me away.' Then Hitler's eyes begin to shine from within, and he does something none of us, not even his closest friends and servants, have ever seen him do before: he kisses Eva Braun on the ▶

Herr and Frau Hitler. *Only at the very end did Eva Braun wed the love of her life.*

I would rather have my children die than live in disgrace, jeered at. Our children have no place in Germany as it will be after the war. ■ Magda Goebbels.

mouth… I don't want to stay here and I don't want to die, but I can't help it. 'I'm staying too,' I say."

A large part of Hitler's entourage made the same choice. They had decided to remain in the bunker with their Führer.

Wenck appointed new saviour

In the bunker, the listless Führer constantly vacillated between despair and vain hopes of an imminent rescue. On the afternoon of 22nd April, the general staff gathered again in the stuffy conference room to look for a new way out. The solution came from Jodl: Berlin's new liberator would be the 44-year-old Walther Wenck – the army's youngest general.

Wenck's Twelfth Army was west of Berlin, holding the Western Allies at bay on the Elbe. But there was little indication that the Americans would make any serious attempt to cross the river. So Wenck could turn back and save Berlin. Finally, Hitler heard something he liked and, according to Traudl Junge, *"once more rouses himself from his lethargy"*.

"Soldiers of Wenck's army! … Your Fuhrer has summoned you, and you have gone into the attack as in the days of conquest. Berlin is waiting for you!" stated the Führer's Order, words that were also broadcast on the streets of Berlin to boost morale.

Although a whiff of hope momentarily seeped through the bunker, the underground community was still primarily characterised by despair. The fact that Hitler began rummaging around in cupboards and drawers to root out papers and documents to be burned in the Reich Chancellery's garden did not exactly signify that the Führer wholeheartedly believed in the Reich's salvation. By the evening meal on 22nd April – just a few hours after naming Wenck as Berlin's saviour – Hitler's mood had again changed.

"He was getting more oddly behaved and difficult to understand all the time. Just as yesterday he hadn't said a word to suggest that he didn't think victory certain, today he said with equal conviction that there was no longer any hope for a change in the situation," Junge recalled.

Hitler also sent for Joseph and Magda Goebbels and the couple's six children, whose names all began with 'H' in honour of the Führer. They were summoned to remain in the bunker until the bitter end, along with 'Uncle Hitler'. For Traudl Junge – and many others in the bunker – it was heartbreaking to see the small children running around the concrete labyrinth, knowing that the five girls and one boy were living on borrowed time, even though the children's smiles and laughter provided a much-needed respite from the otherwise life-sapping grey and gloomy surroundings:

"The six children play in the corridors, happy and contented. They read their fairy-tales at the round table on a landing on the stairs, halfway down to the deepest part of the bunker. They don't hear the explosions getting louder and louder, they feel safe with 'Uncle Führer'. In the afternoon they drink chocolate with their 'uncle' and tell him what they have been doing at school. Helmut, the only boy, reads aloud the composition he wrote for Hitler's birthday. 'You stole that from Daddy,' says his sister Helga. And the adults laugh when the boy replies, 'Or Daddy stole it from me.'"

The hours crept by in the bunker over the following days. Occasionally, a breathless, sweating officer covered in dust would rush down into the depths to report on the Red Army tanks' latest advances, but gradually Hitler became silent and disinterested as he listened to the news.

The women mostly sought each other's company in the bunker, where they tried to talk about anything and everything so as not to constantly think about death: *"Sometimes we slip upstairs, wait for a pause in the artillery fire, and are horrified to see the devastation spreading further and further. We are surrounded by ruins and the remains of buildings ... But my feelings are deadened, I feel quite hollow. There is nothing real or natural left about us,"* Junge wrote.

Eva Braun also often joined the secretaries, confiding to Junge of her *"extraordinary worries"*. The women often played with the dogs and children, not least because Magda Goebbels was barely able to appear calm around her children. Whenever she was with them, she would burst into tears afterwards. But her mind was made up:

"I would rather have my children die than live in disgrace, jeered at. Our children have no place in Germany as it will be after the war," she told Junge.

The nights felt at least as long as the days. Junge and the other secretaries slept on mattresses and cots in the conference room, listening to the snoring of Krebs, Burgdorf and Bormann, who now spent their nights in the soft armchairs in the corridor. But there wasn't much sleep.

"Sometimes we snatch an hour of sleep, but our nervousness soon wakes us again. We want to be ▶

Objects from Hitler's Führerbunker are highly sought after by collectors today.

This phone was taken from the Führerbunker by a Red Army soldier.

there when news that General Wenck is attacking arrives. We keep venturing out into the hell above us and listening, hoping to hear the thunder of German guns at last," Junge said of the atmosphere.

The betrayals continued

The residents of the Führerbunker waited in vain for Wenck's rescue. The young general had other plans than saving Hitler and his capital. Although Wenck was directing his troops to the east as ordered, it was to rescue fellow general Theodor Busse, whose Ninth Army had been surrounded by the Red Army south of Berlin. Together, the two generals would then attempt to fall into US rather than Soviet hands.

Wenck was far from the only one who had stopped following Hitler's orders. The Führer's otherwise loyal and close friend, architect Albert Speer, had for weeks systematically neglected to follow the Führer's Nero Decree, because the minister of armaments considered it insane to destroy all German industry and infrastructure in an absurd last-ditch attempt to slow down the enemy's advance. Hitler, however, caught wind of the failure and summoned Speer to the Führer's bunker on 27th April.

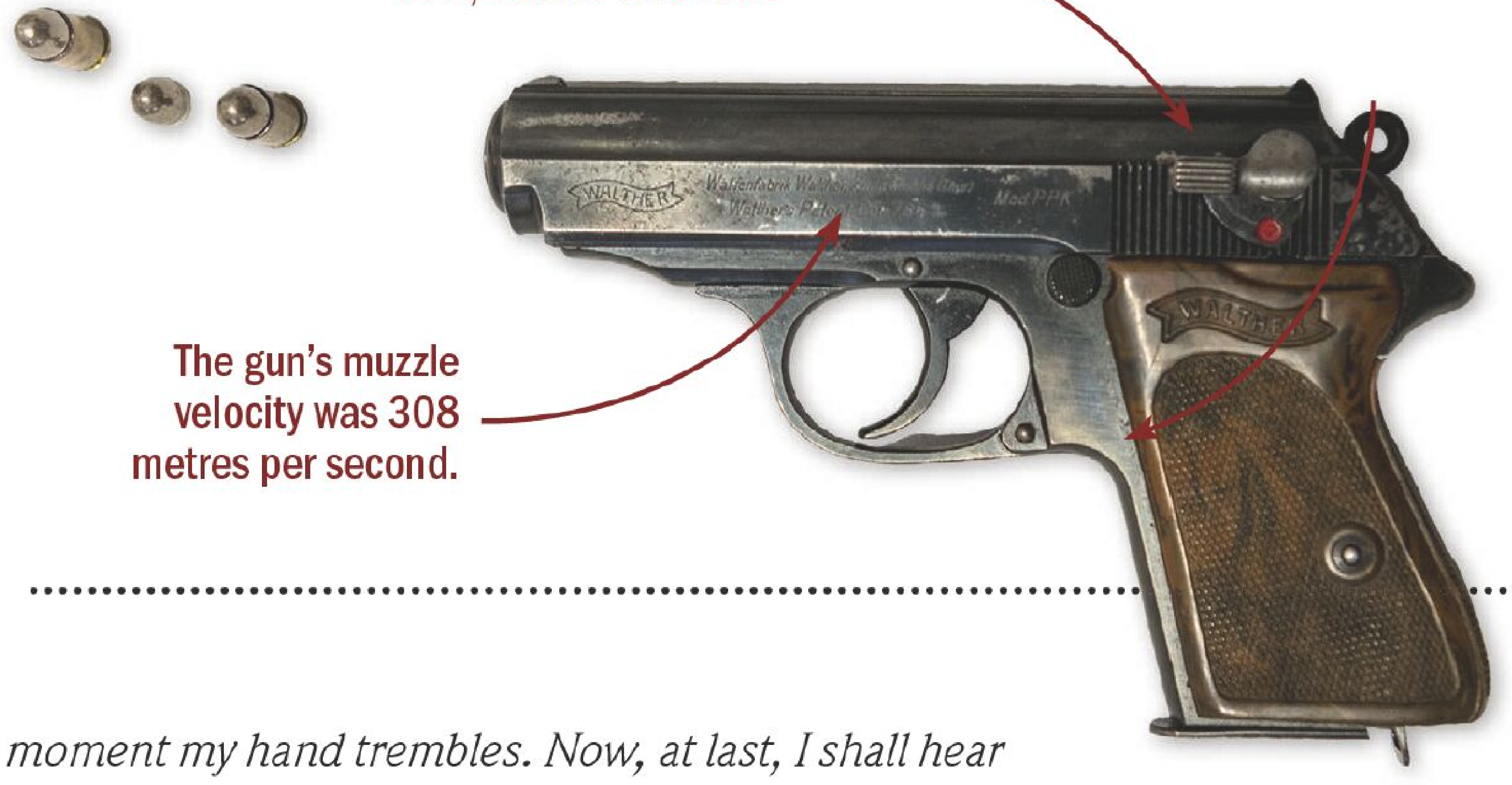
"Bormann has given me a report on your conference with the Ruhr Gauleiters. You pressed them not to carry out my orders and declared that the war is lost. Are you aware of what must follow from that?" Hitler said, before uncharacteristically letting his minister and friend off the hook for treason: *"If you were not my architect, I would take the measures that are called for in such a case."*

In his hour of need, senior Nazis were virtually lining up to betray their Führer. A few days earlier, Reich Marshal Göring had telegraphed Hitler his readiness to take over the leadership of Nazi Germany if the Führer had indeed given up. A furious Hitler responded by dismissing Göring and issuing a warrant for his arrest. An even heavier blow struck the dictator on 28th April, when his press attaché delivered a copy of a Reuters telegram revealing that the Reichsführer of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, had been negotiating with the Allies through Swiss diplomat Count Bernadotte.

Hitler's face turned alternately white and purple with shock and rage. He was now

Magda Goebbels
Joseph Goebbels

Goebbels's six children *were all poisoned. Standing at the back in uniform is Magda's son from her first marriage, Harald Quandt.*



Hitler shot himself with a Walther PPK, calibre 7.65 mm.

The gun's muzzle velocity was 308 metres per second.

convinced that Himmler's SS was also planning a coup against him.

The whole world was collapsing around the Führer as his authority dissipated. Reports that the commander of Army Group Weichsel, Heinrici, had also stopped sending his troops to their deaths in the defence of Berlin also arrived, so Keitel had to sack him.

"Where is Wenck?" was soon the only thing Hitler could utter – if only because he did not yet know that the young general had decided to ignore his call.

During meals with the secretaries and Eva Braun, Hitler tapped his mashed potatoes with resignation.

"The army has betrayed me, the generals are no good for anything. My orders haven't been carried out. It's finally over," he declared in despair, before sharing his plans for his impending suicide:

"I will not fall into the enemy's hands either dead or alive. When I'm dead, my body is to be burned so that no one can ever find it. The best way is to shoot yourself in the mouth. Your skull is shattered and you don't notice anything. Death is instantaneous."

According to Traudl Junge, the women around the table shuddered at the thought of such a death:

"'I want to be a beautiful corpse,' said Eva Braun, 'I shall take poison.' And she took a little brass capsule containing a phial of cyanide from the pocket of her elegant dress. 'I wonder if it hurts very much? I'm so frightened of suffering for a long time,' she confessed. 'I'm ready to die heroically, but at least I want it to be painless.' Hitler told us that death by this poison was completely painless. Your nervous and respiratory systems were paralysed, and you died within a few seconds. And this 'comforting' thought made Frau Christian and me ask the Führer for poison capsules, too. Himmler had given him ten, and when we left him after the meal he personally gave each of us one, saying, 'I am very sorry that I can't give you a better farewell present.'"

Braun finally became a bride

Thoughts of her impending fate in the bunker filled Junge's head and constantly disrupted her sleep. When the secretary awoke on her cot shortly after midnight between 28th and 29th April, she heard activity outside in the corridor and within Hitler's chambers. Servants and orderlies came and went. Junge opened the door to Hitler's study and was greeted by her boss:

"The Führer comes towards me, shakes hands and asks, 'Have you had a nice little rest, child?' When, surprised, I say yes, he adds, 'There's something I'd like you to take down from dictation.' I sit down alone at the big table and wait … Then, suddenly, the Führer utters the first words. 'My political testament.' For a moment my hand trembles. Now, at last, I shall hear what we've been waiting for… an explanation of what has happened, a confession, even a confession of guilt, or perhaps a justification … But my expectations are not fulfilled. In tones of indifference, almost mechanically, the Führer comes out with the explanations, accusations and demands that I, the German people and the whole world know already … He pauses for a brief moment, and then begins dictating his private will. And now I discover that he is going to marry Eva Braun before they are united in death."

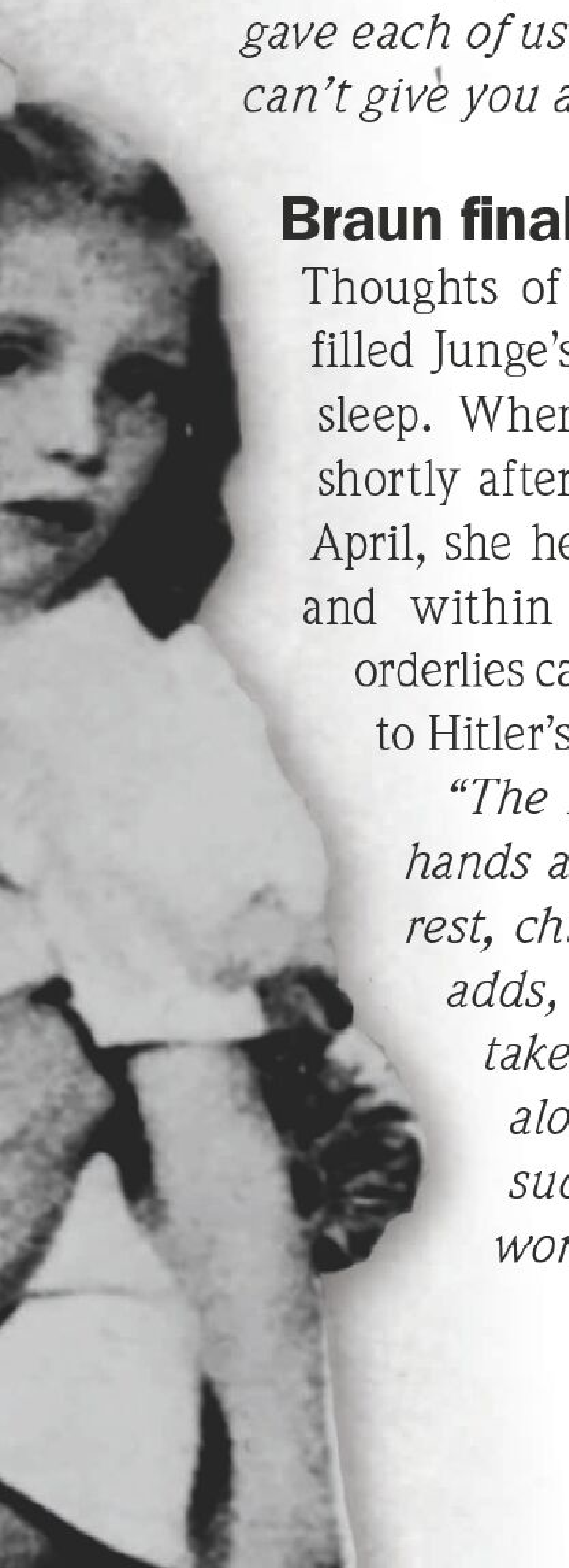
As Junge typed out three versions of Hitler's will, several people gathered in the conference room where the impending wedding was to take place. At a time when Hitler faced only betrayal and rejection, he would finally marry Braun so someone would declare their love for him. Goebbels had sent for the Nazi official Walter Wagner, who had the authority to perform weddings. Wagner had temporarily removed his Volkssturm armband before being taken to the bunker in an armoured personnel carrier. He now stood before the bride and groom, flanked by Hitler's devoted supporters Goebbels and Bormann, who bore witness to the ceremony.

"In the presence of the above-mentioned witnesses, I ask you, my Führer Adolf Hitler, whether you are willing to enter into matrimony with Miss Eva Braun. If such is the case, I ask you to reply yes," Wagner stammered.

Wearing his usual uniform jacket, Hitler responded in the affirmative, before Wagner turned to Eva Braun, who eagerly gave her yes back to the official.

"Now, since both these engaged persons have stated their willingness to enter into matrimony, I herewith declare the marriage valid before the law," Wagner concluded, before returning to the streets of Berlin to once again defend the capital's last remaining inner circle.

After 14 years as the Führer's mistress, Braun had finally become Frau Hitler, and out in the corridor generals and secretaries stood ready to congratulate the couple before the newly-weds retired to the ▶



1945 Over several intense days in April, Hitler goes from an unshakeable belief in victory to deep despair. It all culminates in his suicide, which effectively ends the war.

21-4 The Red Army reaches the outskirts of Berlin. When Hitler wakes up in the morning, he is surprised to hear the thunder of artillery. "Are the Russians already so near?" he says.

small sitting room for a wedding breakfast and champagne. The honeymoon lasted only a few hours and was not marked by dreams of a long and happy future together. Soviet artillery fire continually thundered overhead, reminding everyone of the short time left. His role as bodyguard was largely played out for Rochus Misch once the Führer had decided to die, so the 27-year-old SS man remained mainly in the bunker's communications room:

"Meanwhile, the noose around our necks grew ever tighter. It was clear to all that at any moment the Russians could storm the bunker. I still had lines to almost all Berlin, and so I rang civilians at random to find out where the Red Army was. I discovered later that the Russians were doing exactly the same in order to establish their own frontline. It was dreadfully stuffy in my small switchboard, and made me sleepy. I approved a few cognacs for myself."

On the morning of 30th April, the Soviets launched their attack on the Reichstag building where it was clear that the enemy would soon reach the chancellery. Lunch that day was Hitler's last meal before he told his adjutant Otto Günsche in the afternoon that it was time to say goodbye to his loyal supporters in the bunker. Junge remembered the farewell vividly:

"Günsche comes up to me. 'Come on, the Führer wants to say goodbye.' I rise and go out into the corridor… I vaguely realise there are other people there too. But all I really see is the figure of the Führer. He comes very slowly out of his room, stooping more than ever, stands in the open doorway and shakes hands with everyone. I feel his right hand warm in mine, he looks at me but he isn't seeing me. He seems to be far away. He says something to me, but I don't hear it. I didn't take in his last words. The moment we have been waiting for has come now, and I am frozen and scarcely notice what's going on around me. Only when Eva Braun comes over to me is the spell broken a little. She smiles and embraces me. 'Please do try to get out. You may yet make your way through. And give Bavaria my love,' she says, smiling but with a sob in her voice. She is wearing the Führer's favourite dress, the black one with the roses at the neckline, and her hair is washed and beautifully done. Like that, she follows the Führer into his room – and to her death. The heavy iron door closes."

Junge needed to get as far away as possible, but on her way up the stairs she saw the Goebbels children sitting on the steps. They looked lost. No one had remembered to give them lunch, so Junge followed the children to the round table at the landing, where she made them some sandwiches:

"They say something about being safe in the bunker, and how it's almost fun to hear the explosions when they know the bangs can't hurt them. Suddenly there is the sound of a shot, so loud, so close that we all fall silent. It echoes on through all the rooms. 'That was a direct hit,' cried Helmut, with no idea how right he is."

Bodies were doused in petrol

The gunfire in Hitler's chambers shattered the silence in the bunker when the Führer fired his pistol just before 15:15. Hitler had shot himself in the mouth at the same time as biting his vial of cyanide in half. His skull was shattered. Eva Braun had only taken the poison.

Misch and some of Hitler's loyal staff crowded into the corridor, which stood completely silent after the shot rang out.

"Linge placed his ear to the door of the anteroom. He and Günsche opened the first door to the anteroom. They advanced slowly to Hitler's study door. Nobody drew breath. The second door was opened. I took a few steps forward and craned my neck. I looked for only a few seconds but I have never forgotten what I saw.

"My glance fell first on Eva. She was seated with her legs drawn up, her head inclined towards Hitler. Her shoes were under the sofa. Near her – I cannot remember whether on the sofa or the armchair near it – the dead Hitler. His eyes were open and staring, his head had fallen forward slightly. I saw no blood," Misch wrote.

Günsche and Linge wrapped Hitler's body in an army blanket and carried it through the bunker and up to the Reich Chancellery gardens. Eva Braun's body was carried by Hitler's driver, Erich Kempka, who by then had also procured 200 litres of petrol to burn the bodies with. But Kempka almost dropped Frau Hitler's body on his way up the many steps to the garden:

"I had not reckoned with the weight and my strength failed… Halfway up Günsche hurried to assist me, and together we carried the body of Eva Hitler into the open … Günsche and I lay Eva Hitler beside her husband … Russian shells were exploding around us – it seemed that their artillery had suddenly doubled its bombardment.

"I rushed back to the shelter of the bunker, stopping for a moment, panting… Then I seized a cannister of petrol, ran out again and placed it

WALTHER WENCK (1900-1982)
The general was the youngest of all the commanders who took part in World War II. As the Third Reich approached its end, Wenck oversaw Berlin's final defence. Hitler hoped to the end that Wenck would turn adversity into victory, but the general instead spent his time saving his own troops.

22-4 Hitler suffers a nervous breakdown and admits for the first time that the war can no longer be won.

29-4 With the Red Army deep in the heart of Berlin, Hitler decides to marry Eva Braun – the woman who has always stood by him.

30-4 Hitler commits suicide with Eva Braun. Their bodies are subsequently burned in the Reich Chancellery garden.

Braun followed her husband in death

As a teenager, Eva Braun met Hitler and fell head over heels in love with him. It was not until 14 years later that the couple married, and the marriage lasted just over 24 hours.

In 1929, at the age of 17, Eva Paula Braun met Germany's future Führer when she was employed in Munich by Adolf Hitler's favourite photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann. Braun told her older sister that she had met *"a man of uncertain age with a funny moustache"* who had been admiring her legs in the photo studio. He had subsequently brought her gifts, and after two years of friendship, Braun and Hitler became lovers.

The relationship was kept secret for the sake of Hitler's political career, so Braun did not follow him to Berlin when Hitler became Chancellor in 1933. Braun dreamed of marriage, but Hitler, who was a desirable gentleman to thousands of German women, announced that he was wedded to Germany and did not want marriage.

In 1936, the French sensationalist newspaper *France Soir* published the story 'Hitler's women', revealing several of the Führer's apparently numerous female acquaintances:

"Right now, the favourite is undoubtedly Eva Braun, the daughter of a Munich teacher. Hitler has discarded all other women for her," the gossip column said. Nevertheless, Braun had to settle for the status of secret mistress and was installed in Hitler's Berghof retreat in the Bavarian mountains, where she had to hide away in her room whenever Hitler received official visits from heads of state.

"When he says he loves me, it only means he loves me at that particular instant," she confided to her diary in a moment of clarity.

It was only in their final days together in the Führerbunker that Hitler showed a more genuine love for Braun, and her great dream to get married came true in the early hours of 29th April. Less than 40 hours later, she followed her beloved to her death.

Love for Hitler *led Eva Braun to make her fateful decision.*

Blondi was also sacrificed
Hitler had always loved German shepherds for their unconditional loyalty, but most beloved of all was Blondi. However, the German shepherd had to die when, after news of Himmler's betrayal broke, Hitler feared that the poison ampoule Himmler had given him would not work. Blondi became a guinea pig when Hitler gave his beloved dog a cyanide capsule that killed her.

near the two bodies… I took off the cap of the petrol can … Tensely we waited for the shelling in our area to die down before pouring petrol over the corpses. Then I ran out speedily and grabbed the canister. I was trembling as I poured the contents over the two bodies, and repeatedly told myself that I could not do it, but I was conscious of it being Hitler's last order.

"How should we light the petrol? I protested at a suggestion to ignite the bodies using a hand grenade. My glance fell on a large piece of rag… It took only a second to open the petrol tin and soak the rag with the contents. 'A match!' Dr Goebbels took a box of matches from his pocket and handed it to me. I set light to the rag and once it was afire lobbed it towards the petrol-soaked corpses… A bright flame flared up... Slowly the fire began to nibble at the corpses."

As a sea of flames rose around the Hitlers, the Führer's loyal supporters Goebbels, Bormann, Krebs and Burgdorf stood with outstretched arms. With a final "Heil Hitler" they paid their last respects to their leader. For nearly four hours, the bodies burned until little more than ashes remained. Meanwhile, ▶

Hitler's entourage in the bunker began to consider what to do next. Should they follow their Führer to his death or try to save their lives amidst the chaos?

Goebbels family commits suicide

Traudl Junge did not want to die, even though she had been given cyanide. The 25-year-old secretary chose to escape on 1st May in the company of SS adjutant Otto Günsche and a handful of other men:

"Krebs and Burgdorf stand up, smooth down their uniform tunics, and shake hands with everyone in farewell. They are not leaving, they're going to shoot themselves here. Then they go out, parting from those who mean to wait longer. We must wait for darkness to fall. Goebbels walks restlessly up and down, smoking, like a hotel proprietor waiting discreetly and in silence for the last guests to leave the bar. He has stopped complaining and ranting. So the time has come. We all shake hands with him in farewell. He wishes me good luck, with a twisted smile. 'You may get through,' he says softly, in heartfelt tones. But I shake my head doubtfully… One by one, we leave these scenes of horror. I pass Hitler's door for the last time," wrote Junge, who escaped the bunker alive but was captured and held in Soviet captivity until December 1945.

Unlike Junge, Nazi ideology was so deeply rooted in the marrow of Goebbels's thin bones that the propaganda minister did not want himself or his family to live in a Germany without Hitler. So the couple called in SS dentist Helmut Kunz.

"Doctor, I'd be grateful if you would help my wife to put the children to sleep," Goebbels told the dentist Kunz, who tried to talk the couple out of the decision, suggesting instead that they send the children to the Red Cross, where they would be safe from the Soviets. That would be impossible – they were his children, was all the propaganda minister could say.

Rochus Misch, still manning the telephone in the bunker's communications room, remembered how Magda Goebbels dressed the children in the adjoining room where the boy and five girls had slept the previous week:

"Magda Goebbels then began changing one after the other into the same type of long white nightdress ... She combed their hair and caressed the children gently. The nine-year-old Helga was crying ... I knew that this was the final parting of a mother from her children, but I did not want to see it. Frau Goebbels was preparing her children for death."

A short while later, the children were in their bunk beds and Dr Kunz entered their room. *"Not to worry. The doctor here is going to give you each a little jab that all the other children and soldiers are getting,"* the mother reassured before leaving the room.

The doctor went from bed to bed and quickly injected each child with morphine. The dentist ▸

Hitler's double, *Gustav Weler, remained in the Führerbunker and was murdered by the SS as the Red Army approached. No one knew why the double was murdered, but his body was placed outside the Führerbunker and later fuelled conspiracy theories that Hitler had tried to trick the Soviets before escaping in the heat of battle.*

> It's done. The children are dead. Now for ourselves. ■ Magda Goebbels

Sightseeing in the ruins. *After Hitler's death, Allied leaders – in this instance Churchill – made a pilgrimage to the site where Hitler met his end.*

claimed after the war that he refused to poison the sleeping children and left the room. Instead, it was Hitler's remaining personal physician, Ludwig Stumpfegger, who, together with Magda Goebbels, entered the bedroom, opened the children's mouths, placed a poison capsule between their teeth and clenched their jaws. The eldest daughter, Helga, was found with marks on her face, indicating that she may have put up a struggle.

After the deed was done, Mrs Goebbels joined her husband in his study: *"It's done. The children are dead. Now for ourselves,"* she told her husband.

"We've got to hurry now, there's very little time," Goebbels said, though he did take the time to say goodbye to Misch in the communications room.

"Goebbels gave me a sudden look as if he were seeing me for the first time. Perhaps the fact that he had to address his last words to a simple SS man of the erstwhile bodyguard humiliated him. 'The war is lost – les jeux sont faits. We knew how to live, and now we have to know how to die. I do not need you any longer, Misch. Clear up here.'

"Then he gave me his hand, something he had never done before. His handshake was firm; his fingers cold. Without another word he withdrew into his room … It was the end of my captivity in the Führerbunker," wrote Misch, who survived the war but had to spend eight years as a Soviet prisoner.

Joseph and Magda Goebbels walked up the steps to the chancellery garden with adjutant Günther Schwägermann. Gunshots and shells filled the evening sky as the couple took a seat next to the scorched spot where Hitler and his wife had been burned. They put their cyanide capsules in their mouths and chewed hard. Either they shot themselves at the same moment with two Walther pistols they had brought with them, or Schwägermann gave them the coup de grâce and death was certain. By agreement, the adjutant then poured gasoline over their bodies and set them on fire before fleeing. Just hours later, Red Army soldiers made their way to the chancellery garden and the Führerbunker. The bodies of the Goebbels couple were only partially burned. A Soviet major said he could still recognize Joseph Goebbels's distinctive face.

The capture of the Führerbunker went off without a fight. It had been cleared and emptied of life. Only the smell of defeat and death remained in the depths. Berlin's last stronghold had finally fallen.

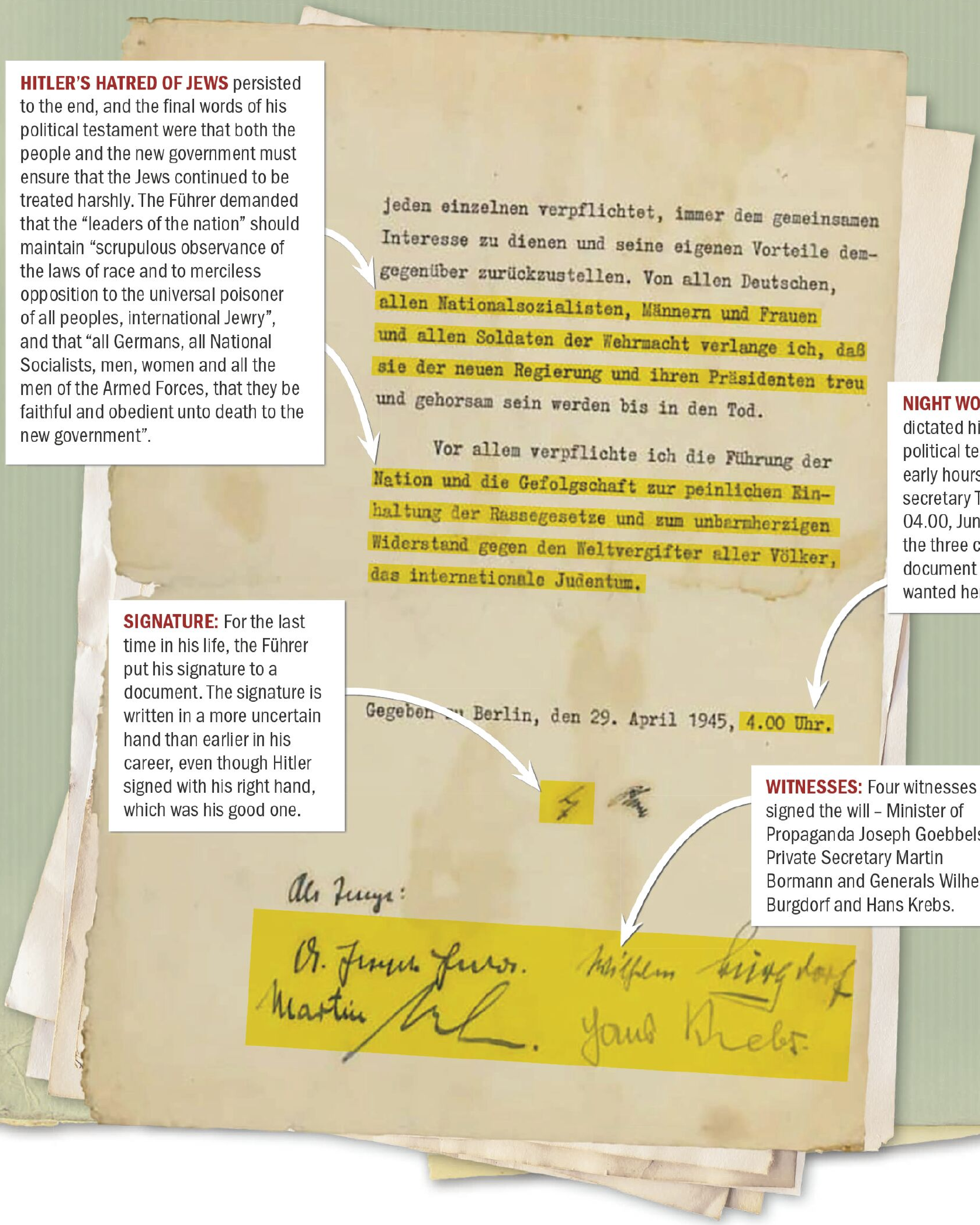
Hitler had no regrets

A day and a half before his death, Hitler had both his private and political wills written. The Führer insisted that his policies had been the right ones and that they must continue after his death.

To the end, Hitler maintained his belief that during his 12 years as Germany's leader he had created a better society. His "love and loyalty to my people" was the foundation of all his actions, and the Führer argued that he had never wanted war.

International "Jewish interests" had forced him into it, he claimed, making no mention of the millions of dead who had paid the price for his policies. On the contrary, he imagined that "in spite of all setbacks" of the war, it would "go down one day in history as the most glorious and valiant demonstration of a nation's life purpose". In his private will and testament, Hitler explained that "in order to escape the disgrace of deposition or capitulation", he chose death with his spouse:

"It is our wish to be burnt immediately on the spot where I have carried out the greatest part of my daily work in the course of a 12 years' service to my people ... What I possess belongs – in so far as it has any value – to the Party [or] the State."



jeden einzelnen verpflichtet, immer dem gemeinsamen Interesse zu dienen und seine eigenen Vorteile demgegenüber zurückzustellen. Von allen Deutschen, allen Nationalsozialisten, Männern und Frauen und allen Soldaten der Wehrmacht verlange ich, daß sie der neuen Regierung und ihren Präsidenten treu und gehorsam sein werden bis in den Tod.

Vor allem verpflichte ich die Führung der Nation und die Gefolgschaft zur peinlichen Einhaltung der Rassegesetze und zum unbarmherzigen Widerstand gegen den Weltvergifter aller Völker, das internationale Judentum.

Gegeben zu Berlin, den 29. April 1945, 4.00 Uhr.

Als Zeuge:

Dr. Joseph Goebbels. Wilhelm Burgdorf

Martin Bormann. Hans Krebs.

HITLER'S HATRED OF JEWS persisted to the end, and the final words of his political testament were that both the people and the new government must ensure that the Jews continued to be treated harshly. The Führer demanded that the "leaders of the nation" should maintain "scrupulous observance of the laws of race and to merciless opposition to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry", and that "all Germans, all National Socialists, men, women and all the men of the Armed Forces, that they be faithful and obedient unto death to the new government".

NIGHT WORK: Hitler dictated his will and political testament in the early hours of 29th April to secretary Traudl Junge. At 04.00, Junge finished typing the three copies of the document that the Führer wanted her to create.

SIGNATURE: For the last time in his life, the Führer put his signature to a document. The signature is written in a more uncertain hand than earlier in his career, even though Hitler signed with his right hand, which was his good one.

WITNESSES: Four witnesses signed the will – Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels, Private Secretary Martin Bormann and Generals Wilhelm Burgdorf and Hans Krebs.

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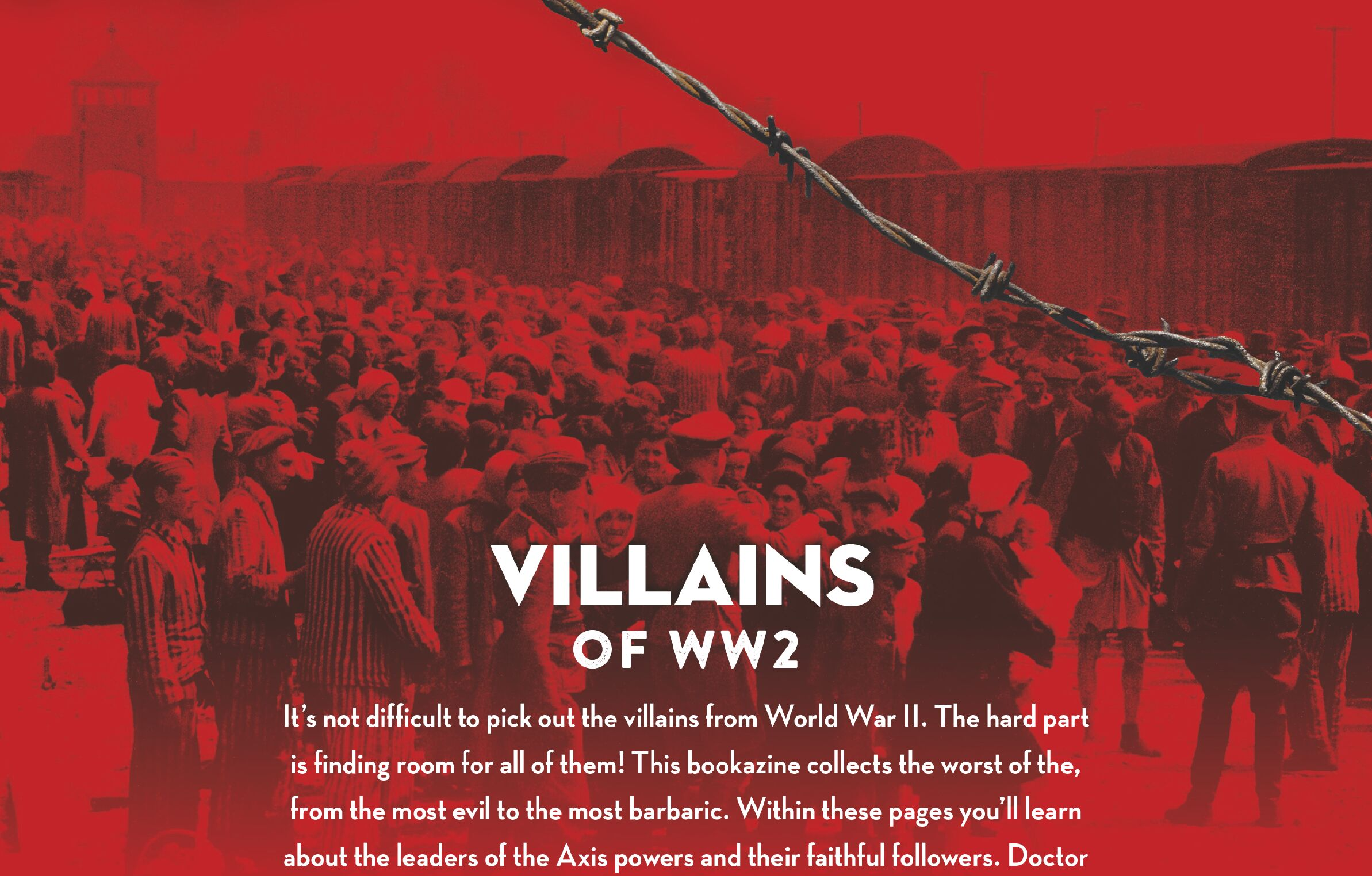

VILLAINS
OF WW2

It's not difficult to pick out the villains from World War II. The hard part is finding room for all of them! This bookazine collects the worst of the, from the most evil to the most barbaric. Within these pages you'll learn about the leaders of the Axis powers and their faithful followers. Doctor of Deaths Josef Mengele and Shiro Ishii, the henchmen Goebbels, Göring and Himmler. All these and a host of other war criminals who in their own way contributed to the atrocities and mass murder that took place during the most brutal and devastating war in history.

Hitler ordered Goebbels to create a portrayal of Poland as aggressive and whose soldiers attacked German border troops
960,000 Jews
70,000–75,000 Poles
Rudolf Höss
FAMILY MAN BUILT HITLER'S DEATH FACTORY
c. 1,000,000 VICTIMS
HITLER'S SECRET
DEATH VANS

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